

Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society



Circus Historical Society

The Circus Historical Society's mission is to preserve, promote, and share through education the history, and cultural significance of the circus and allied arts, past and present.

Founded in 1939, the Circus Historical Society (CHS) celebrates the rich history of the circus in America and around the world. Our membership includes historians, scholars, fans, circus performers and personnel, memorabilia collectors, and individuals who share a love of the circus and a desire to preserve, understand, and explore its fascinating heritage.

Benefits of membership include a subscription to CHS's journal, *Bandwagon*. The journal features a range of research and articles related to the rich history of the circus. Article types vary from intensively researched historical essays to wonderfully vivid oral histories that capture the stories of individuals from all aspects of the circus world. Members also receive newsletters filled with fascinating circus facts and news from members, circuses, museums and other related groups around the world.

CHS members gather annually at a different locations in North America to hold a convention. These meetings are an opportunity for members to come together to experience live circus performances, see presentations about circus history, share their own unique interests, and learn more about the importance of the circus arts in our shared cultural history.

**For information on joining the Circus Historical Society,
visit the website at: www.circushistory.org**

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Frederick W. Glasier, Barnum & Bailey Show.

Courtesy of The Ringling Museum,
Frederick W. Glasier Collection

Bandwagon

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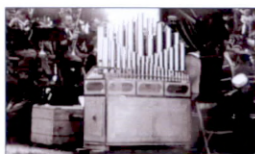
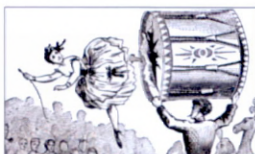


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Circus Historical Society

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Mission Statement

"To preserve, promote, and share through education the history and cultural significance of the circus and allied arts, past and present."

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Introduction

This year, marked by extraordinary change in the business of circus coincidentally, also must be noted as a time when the circus arts are receiving special attention from the Smithsonian Institution and other cultural organizations.

On January 14, 2017, circus history was made with the astonishing announcement that after more than a century as a leader in live entertainment, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows would perform for the last time on May 21 in Uniondale, New York. The reverberations of that announcement continue to impact members of the circus community around the globe.

The effects of the Smithsonian Institution's Folklife Festival program Circus Arts, will also have a lasting impact on public perceptions of the circus and its role in American culture. The festival is intended to celebrate the diversity, resilience and rich culture of the people who make up the circus community. Visitors will be inspired and informed through firsthand experiences with the people of the circus. It is an opportunity to highlight the dedication, skill and extraordinary passion that characterizes the entire community.

A passion for circus certainly characterizes members of the Circus Historical Society (CHS), a not-for-profit group founded in 1939 to preserve, promote and share through education, the history and cultural significance of the circus and allied arts, past and present. In 1942, the first issue of *Bandwagon* was sent to members, replacing an earlier publication. For 77 years this journal, along with an annual convention, has been the organization's primary format for sharing the research of its members and others who have delved deeply into the history of the circus. Nearly 50 years of that span was overseen by Fred D. Pfening, Jr. and without his dedication, energy and expertise, this journal would not exist.

This issue of *Bandwagon* has been created for both active members of our organization and also for those whose curiosity has been peaked by the Folklife Festival's celebration of the circus. In this issue we share a few of the excellent articles that have been published in this journal over the years. CHS members will recognize the authors featured here, some of the finest historians to turn their attention to the circus and traveling entertainments. Through their scholarship, the influence of the circus, the lives of its great talents, and the contributions of the traveling entertainment to the shape of American society, help us understand how the circus arts remain a vibrant part of our culture.

Stuart Thayer's writings often explored the intersection of American culture and the traveling shows, particularly in the 19th century. His article "The Yankee and the Circus" gives insight into

the overlap of circus and theater, particularly in how they were perceived by austere communities of the Northeast in the early to mid-19th century and how those perceptions still occasionally color public perceptions. Dr. Arthur Saxon, John Daniel Draper and Steve Gossard offer readers the stories of three individuals who made significant contributions to both the industry and artistry of the circus. Dr. Saxon's informal overview of James A. Bailey, partner of the famed P. T. Barnum, is one of the most informative pieces published about this elusive and influential man. Draper's overview of equestrienne Louise Tourniaire and her family of riders sheds light on the strong role of female performers throughout circus history, while Gossard's eloquent eulogy of flying trapeze artist Fay Alexander gives a sense of the strong interconnectedness of the circus community as a whole.

The logistical side of circus history is represented by articles that address such circus features as the street parade and exciting balloon ascensions. Greg Parkinson used a variety of historical documents including photographs, posters and moving images to document the last of James Bailey's great parades, while William Slout explored the unique offering of balloon ascensions meant to draw audiences to the circus lot. Fred Dahlinger, Jr. chronicled the development of the air calliope, whose piping notes are so frequently associated with the circus. Sociologist Marcello Truzzi, with his father, famed juggler Massimiliano Truzzi, wrote a brief overview of the juggling arts, with special focus on a few of the standout stars of the art. Wrapping up this issue is a tribute by Richard Reynolds to one of the great animal stars of the American circus, the hippopotamus Lotus, who lived more than 50 years with the circus.

These articles were selected by a committee of CHS members, and I am most grateful to Chris Berry, Richard Flint, Fred Pfening III and Deborah Walk for their assistance in narrowing a broad field of very worthy research to a manageable number of articles. I am also indebted to the authors and their families who were supportive of this opportunity to share their writing once again. Additional thanks are due to the CHS Board, particularly President Don Covington, Vice President Alan Campbell and Treasurer Les Smout for their assistance in the project. Fred Dahlinger, Associate Editor, assisted in suggesting titles to consider and identifying images to illustrate this issue. John and Mardi Wells from QDX did a wonderful job laying out this issue and assuring that, visually, it would do justice to the great scholarship it represents.

A final and important note of recognition is due to

the staffs of the institutions that are dedicated to preserving collections of circus history. Without access to the rich collections of photographs, posters, research materials and other items, the stories shared in these pages would not be brought to life with such vivid illustrations. Special Collections at Milner Library, part of Illinois State University at Bloomington-Normal; the archives at Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin; and the archives at The Ringling Circus Museum in Sarasota, Florida have been steadfast supporters of CHS and *Bandwagon*.

For readers who are not yet members, we hope that this issue will expand your understanding of the circus arts and perhaps peak your interest to learn more. The Circus Historical Society is a passionate community and we invite you to join us in our efforts to document, preserve and celebrate the circus arts past and present.

About the Covers

The front cover features a detail from a 1916 Barnum & Bailey poster printed by Strobridge Lithographing Co. of Cincinnati, Ohio. In the original, the show title is at the top of the image. On the back is a photograph taken by Frederick W. Glasier of Barnum & Bailey clown, Dan Ryan, with a child peeking into a tent, circa 1905. Both items are in the collection of The Ringling Museum.



A postcard produced for the Ringling Winter Quarters in Sarasota, Florida featuring the wide mouthed hippo Lotus. See more about Lotus starting on page 78.

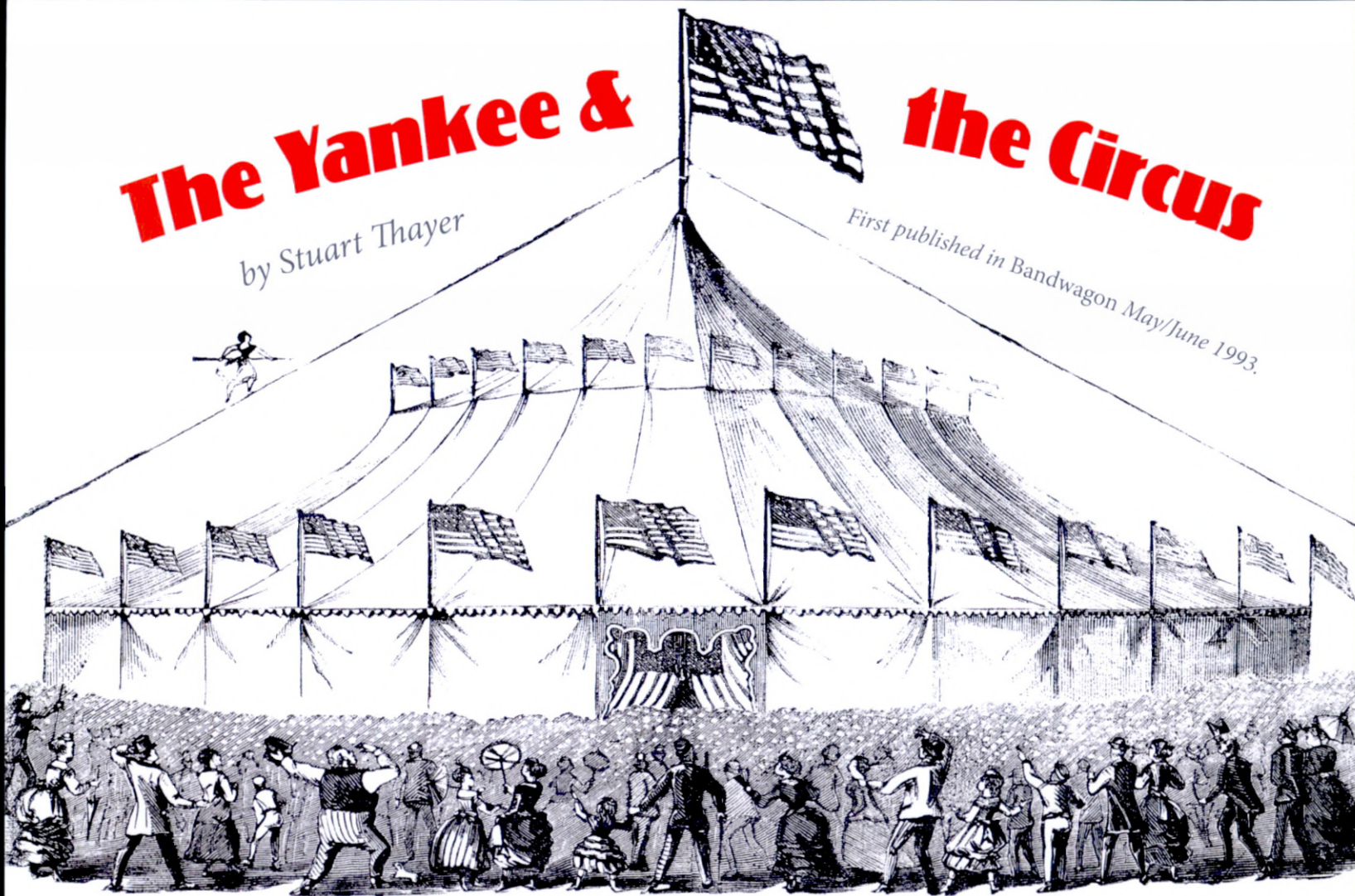
The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

The Yankee &

by Stuart Thayer

the Circus

First published in Bandwagon May/June 1993.



All images in this article come from heralds in the Tibbals Collection at The Ringling Museum.

The circus is an international institution, presented on all continents and in most countries in the same or similar style. There are not many cultures that do not have the circus as a recognizable popular entertainment. It is accepted and attended, probably even applauded, wherever it appears. And it seems to me that something so universally popular, while perhaps adding little or nothing to the wisdom of the ages, is the sort of institution that it would be difficult to object to.

However, in one section of the United States, serious objections were raised in the past, and, more importantly, actions were taken in support of the attitude. That this region was New England you know from my title, but it is also of interest to know that in no other part of North America did the bias toward popular entertainment affect that entertainment as much as it did in the Northeastern states. Echoes of the attitude survived in New England as late as 1940.

An 1849 conference of clergymen produced a statement that went: "... there is an increasing tendency among our brethren and sisters ... to countenance certain fash-

ionable and sinful places of amusement, such as dancing parties, theatrical and circus performances. Such amusements we believe to be wholly inconsistent with Christian character, destructive of vital piety, ruinous to the religious impression of the rising generation."¹

This was not an unusual declaration, in fact, we would describe it as typical of the times. The objection to arenic performances had its foundation in anti-theatre bias. The circus was included because, in the public's eye, it was not greatly different from the theatre and, indeed, the managers themselves did little to distinguish between the two types of entertainment. The circus was introduced to America in 1793, 50 years after the introduction of the spoken drama, and it inherited whatever prejudices there were against the theatre.

From its beginnings the theatre had combined types of entertainment. Drama, farce, and athletic skills were all seen on the same program. A serious play would have rope dancers on stage between the acts and be followed by a slapstick farce. Showmen felt, apparently with good reason, that an audience would not sit through a serious drama if

they thought that was all they were going to see. West Hill explains this as the result of the middle class audience of the Federal era desiring contrived endings, sentimental comedies and musical afterpieces.² No Dryden or Sheridan or Goldsmith for them.

Later, theatre managers adopted the practice of borrowing acts directly from the circus. Programs failing for lack of custom were buttressed by the addition of equestrian displays. These were usually presented in front of the stage, a portion of the pit being turned into a ring. It was not uncommon to find more and more of the circus in a theatre as the season waned and audiences became jaded with the drama. In time, the circus did the same thing, offering spoken drama to bolster the ring performance. Such events were in the period prior to the adoption of the canvas tent when circus troupes performed in wooden arenas. Thus, the dramatic house would partake of the ring and the circus arena of the drama so that in the public mind there was little to distinguish them one from another. Then, in 1816 James West came to America from England with his large circus troupe which was well-versed in what we now call hippodrama.

These were a series of plays featuring horses. Whole troops

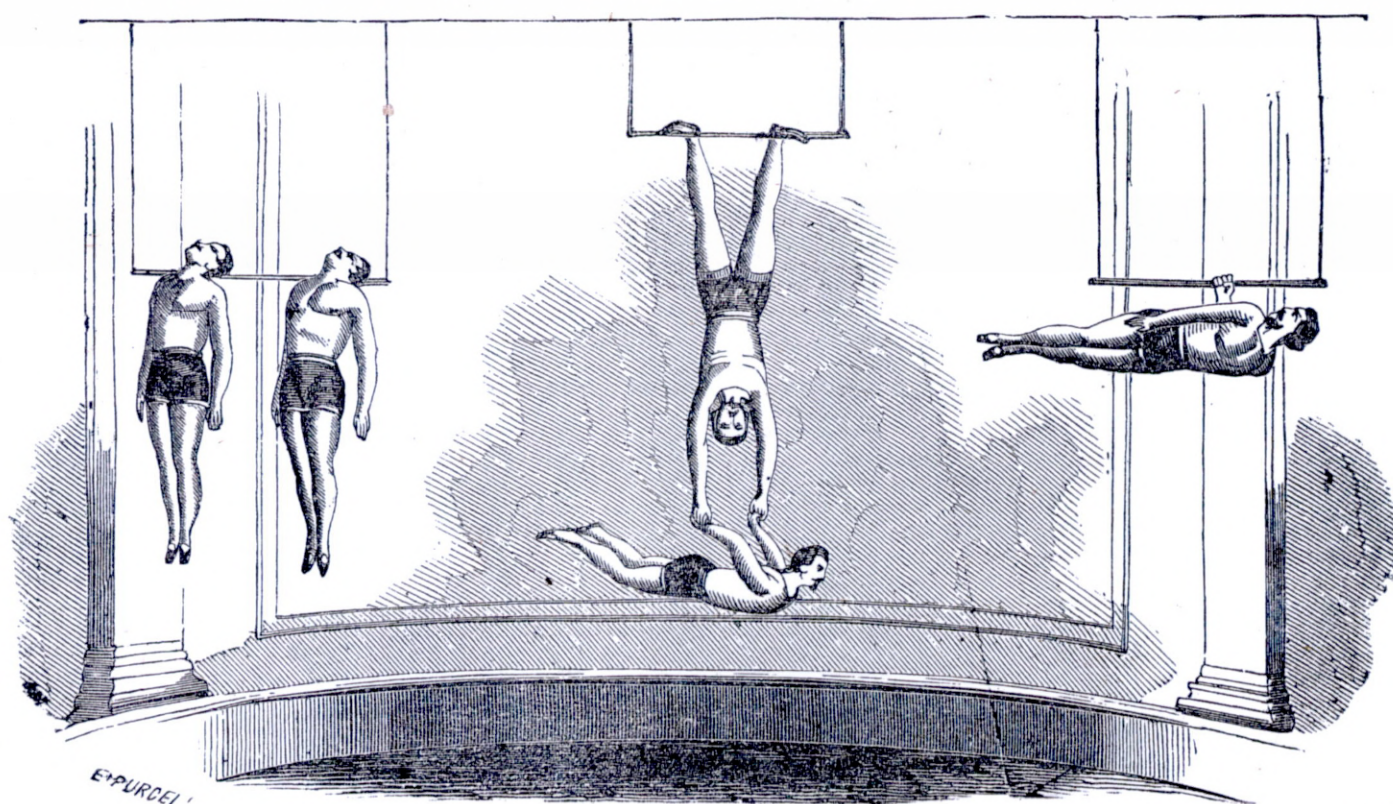
of knights or cavalry or cossacks rode back and forth on the stage lending realism to dramas of rescue and war. These were extremely popular in Europe and were so for a long time. In America they flourished from West's introduction of them in 1816 until the use of the canvas tent became popular, about 1828. The important thing about them, as far as our subject is concerned, is that they reinforced the idea of the circus and theatre being the same or nearly so.

The circus was introduced into America by a Scotsman, John Bill Ricketts. He was a rider trained in England who transferred the genre without change from that country to this. It was in 1793 that he opened his arena in Philadelphia and presented the first multi-act program in this country.

He featured his own riding, his brother's acrobatic skills, the posturing of a clown and, within weeks, a rope dancer. Ricketts did not invent the circus. That honor goes to one Philip Astley, a retired dragoon, who in 1771 presented the first multi-act circus in England, and the world, in an open space near Westminster Bridge in London. Astley's earliest rival in London was Charles Hughes, proprietor of the Royal Circus. Ricketts was a pupil of Hughes.

In America, Ricketts was immediately successful and played for four months in Philadelphia and then for three more in New York in an arena near the Battery. In the winter of 1793 and the spring of 1794 his troupe





visited Charleston, Norfolk, Richmond and Baltimore before returning to Philadelphia for a second season. Since that time there have been only one or two years in which there has not been a circus performance in the United States.

The genre became more and more popular over time and was offered in more cities each year until, by the time of the settlement of the Ohio and Mississippi valleys, it was the leading professional amusement in the country. Nothing approached the popularity of the circus until the advent of Vaudeville – a strictly urban entertainment. As rural entertainment the circus was not to be surpassed until the common use of radio.

Having introduced the circus to America, Ricketts in 1795 introduced it into New England. In May of that year he built an arena in Boston and performed in it for over two months. He also gave shows in Providence and Hartford, before returning to his arena in New York.

In Hartford, for reasons we will explain, he used a canvas enclosure, a circular wall behind which he performed. In Boston and Providence, however, he built the more traditional wooden arenas. These buildings, quite temporary, often not even painted, were constructed in each city where halls could not be rented, which meant building them almost everywhere they performed. They were as large as 80

feet in diameter with walls from 8 to 18 feet high. Sometimes they were roofed, sometimes not; if so, the roof would be a pointed thing rising 20 or 30 feet. They were circular in shape, based on the ring which was at their center. The pit area, usually without seats, surrounded the ring. Raised boxes, each with three to five benches in them, lay against the outer walls. On average the capacity of these arenas was 800 people. Persons who could not afford tickets often stood outside or climbed on the roof to watch through cracks in the jerry-built structures. In Boston in September, 1796 so many climbed onto Lailson's Circus they collapsed the roof. This mode of operation persisted until the adoption of the tent in 1825 and in the winter for some seasons thereafter.

Ricketts had no opposition, as such, to his appearances in New England. Being the first such showman to appear, it was not likely he would; however, he was affected by Connecticut law on his visit to Hartford. We mentioned that he made use of a canvas enclosure there in 1796, the only instance we have of him doing so in his six-year career in America. The reason for this was that it was illegal to give a theatrical performance in Connecticut and had been since 1773.³ Ricketts would have had to obtain a permit from the city fathers in order to erect an arena. Since his performance was illegal it would have been denied him.

This 1773 law banned theatrical performances of any

kind and it was similar to ones passed in every colony excepting Virginia and Maryland. However, by the time the circus appeared in 1793 most of these ordinances had been repealed. Massachusetts, for instance, having done so in 1792. The Connecticut legislature, however, did not repeal their anti-theatrical laws with the advent of the circus. They simply amended them to include this new breach of the peace.

They rewrote the ordinance of 1773 in 1798 and it then forbade tricks of tumbling, rope-walking, puppet shows and any uncommon feats of agility of the body, if performed for money. A fine of not less than 60 nor more than 200 dollars was set.

Vermont, visited much later by circuses, forbade their appearance in an 1836 law that read: "Circus riding, theatrical exhibitions, juggling or sleight-of-hand, ventriloquism and magic arts shall be, and are, declared to be common and public nuisances and offenses against the state."⁴

The Connecticut law was tested in 1826 when James Hunter brought a small circus troupe to Hartford. Hunter, an Englishman, had come to America in 1822 to work for the Price and Simpson Circus. He was the first man to ride a horse "in the rude state of nature," what we call bareback riding. He single-handedly revolutionized the art of circus riding and provided a standard against which all riders have since been measured. He performed in Hartford from the 10th to the 13th of March at which time he was arrested and charged with committing rope dancing, tumbling and various feats of uncommon dexterity or agility of the body. The case was titled *Sundry Inhabitants of Hartford vs. James Hunter*. It was heard on March 28, 1826.

After hearing the evidence the jury returned twice, stating that they could not reach a verdict. On the third attempt they found Hunter guilty of rope dancing and extraordinary feats of agility and dexterity of body. The judge then fined him 60 dollars, the minimum under the statute.

One of the more interesting reactions to the trial appeared in the *Baltimore Patriot* of April 14. It asked: "Is there also a law in Connecticut prohibiting certain feats of the mind in the legislature that no one has performed an extraordinary feat of liberality and good sense by blotting from the statute book ... such a relic of the dark ages?"

Whatever the reaction of the outside world, Connecticut's action in the case certainly discouraged more visits by circuses. We find none there until 1852, 26 years after Hunter's conviction. If circuses played there in the intervening years they did not advertise the fact. As late as 1859 James M. Nixon's troupe, during an engagement in Hart-

ford, did not use the word "circus" in their ads. The law itself was finally repealed in 1860.

A very early commentator on American manners, Michael Chevalier, wrote in 1836: "It is from the [Yankee] that the country has taken a general tone of austere severity that is religious and even bigoted because of him all sorts of amusements which among [Europeans] are considered innocent relaxations, are here proscribed as immoral pleasures."⁵

He was referring, as we know, to the Puritan ethic. And, indeed, that was the code by which most New Englanders lived and by which they preferred to be governed.

Puritans and their successors in thought held an activist view of God which called for an intense promotion of laborious and dutiful living. Man was on earth to serve God's purpose and work was the essential element of that purpose. This made for an active people, a society working hard to do God's bidding. It was a serious society, mentally serious, in which make-believe was a worldly compromise with the devil. The theatre, and by association the circus, were make-believe.

This Calvinist approach, while not universally adhered to, was followed by New Englanders of power and persuasion. Their attitudes had strength because they imposed a zeal upon those who held them and this zeal was expressed by their legislators and by those speaking from the pulpit.

Henry Ward Beecher, the famous clergyman, wrote a book titled *Lectures to Young Men* which was published in 1844. He was rather specific as to what he saw as the evils of amusements. He listed them as:

1. A waste of time.
2. A waste of money.
3. Incompatible with ordinary pursuits (i.e., they made the kitchen and the shop seem dull by comparison).
4. They engage one in bad company.
5. Gamblers, circus riders, actors and jockeys live off society without returning any equivalent for their support.
6. Such pursuits demoralize men and corrupt youth.⁶

This volume was a popular source of youthful etiquette, went through many printings and was still being published in 1890.

It was not only from the pulpit that one heard the circus castigated. The *Hartford Connecticut Observer* in 1826 editorialized quite closely to Beecher's arguments. It objected

to the circus because it was a waste of time, a corruption of taste, dissipating serious reflection and holding out to the young the temptation to obtain the means of attendance. Older visitors were seen at the circus whose families lacked the necessities of life and whose creditors must fail of receiving their just dues.

It is interesting to note that in none of these polemical attacks is the content of the circus mentioned. Only its purpose, or more properly, lack of purpose, is criticized. This could have been because none of the critics knew what went on in the arena, but this appears doubtful. More likely, it was because there was nothing in the performance itself that was objectionable. These bad men did not do bad things. They wasted their time and that of the audience, true, and they wasted talents that God had given them, but an exhibition of athletic skills held out no moral pretensions, as did the theatre, nor hope of gain, as did the race-track.

Baseball, when it began to take up so much of the leisure time of 19th century Americans, was similarly damned. Yet, it, too, was but an exhibition of skills. Chasing a little ball about a field may have been silly, but of itself hardly harmful. Activities concomitant to baseball exhibitions such as gambling and public drunkenness, again, effort with no good purpose, no spiritual return, caught the eye and anger of the pious and nearly doomed the game.

To this point in our discussion the Yankee opposition to amusements has been based on precepts that were really older than the nation. And, as we said, they were strong because the society was homogeneous and of similar attitude toward existence. But this homogeneity was challenged after the Revolution and especially after the War of 1812 when the great exodus to the West was begun. A sort of "home-grown" set of rules was established. Douglas Miller characterized this shift as occurring between the War of 1812 and the age of Jackson. And he says that America changed from a tenacious, traditional society, fearful of innovation to a shifting, restless and insecure world bent on finding quicker ways to wealth than before.⁷

It was at this time that the colonial society, dominated by a landowning aristocracy and the leaders of the churches, began to dissolve. The old order was challenged by democratization, by religious dissent and by a rise of irreverence to class and status. The farmer and the wage earner, the "common men" – of historiography, were gaining insight into the blessings of a less restricted existence. They were abetted in this by the rising merchant class who were largely outside the political and social circles they

thought their new prosperity entitled them to inhabit. The Federal aristocracy, the landowners, sons of the men who had established the colonial society, were alarmed by these political and social pretensions. They were also alarmed by the Whisky Rebellion, Thomas Jefferson and, above all, by Andrew Jackson.

The political aristocracy and the leaders of the Calvinist churches began, about 1815, an attempt to reassert their control over the society. They wanted to maintain the rigid class structure and strict church attendance upon which they thought the society was based. By combining an emphasis on moral behavior and an interest in religious instruction they hoped to end the menace to the status quo.

Benevolent societies were organized. The most famous of these being the American Home Missionary Society, the American Tract Society and the American Sunday School Union. The education of ministers was subsidized, roving ministries were supported and thousands of Bibles printed which were to be handed out across the land. All this was done in an attempt to lead men back into the Christian life, which included, of course, proper political and social conduct.

This was guided by the precepts that those who lived proper lives prospered; that those who deserved to be rich were rich. They deplored the rising crime and incidence of riot, the spending of money on worthless amusements that characterized the poor people of the day. And, though they seldom said it, they also deplored mass immigration, Roman Catholicism, trade unions and people who did not pay their bills.

An editorial comment in a Belfast, Maine newspaper of 1847 illustrates this attitude.

"Got a paper to spare?

"Yes, sir, here's one of our last. Would you like to subscribe, sir, and take it regularly?

"I would - but I am too poor.

"That man had just returned from the circus, which cost fifty cents; lost time from his farm, fifty cents; whisky, judging by the smell, at least fifty cents – making a dollar and a half actually thrown away, and then begging for a newspaper, alleging that he was too poor to pay for it!"⁸

Thus, the objections to popular amusements, that they were a waste of time and a waste of money, were given new life as the half-century mark was neared.

Yet, with all this objection by what might be called the leaders of the society, the circus and the theatre and horse

racing survived, in fact they were all approaching very prosperous times in New England and elsewhere. Why was this so? We suggest that the lives of the people who made up the audience were in large part responsible for the response.

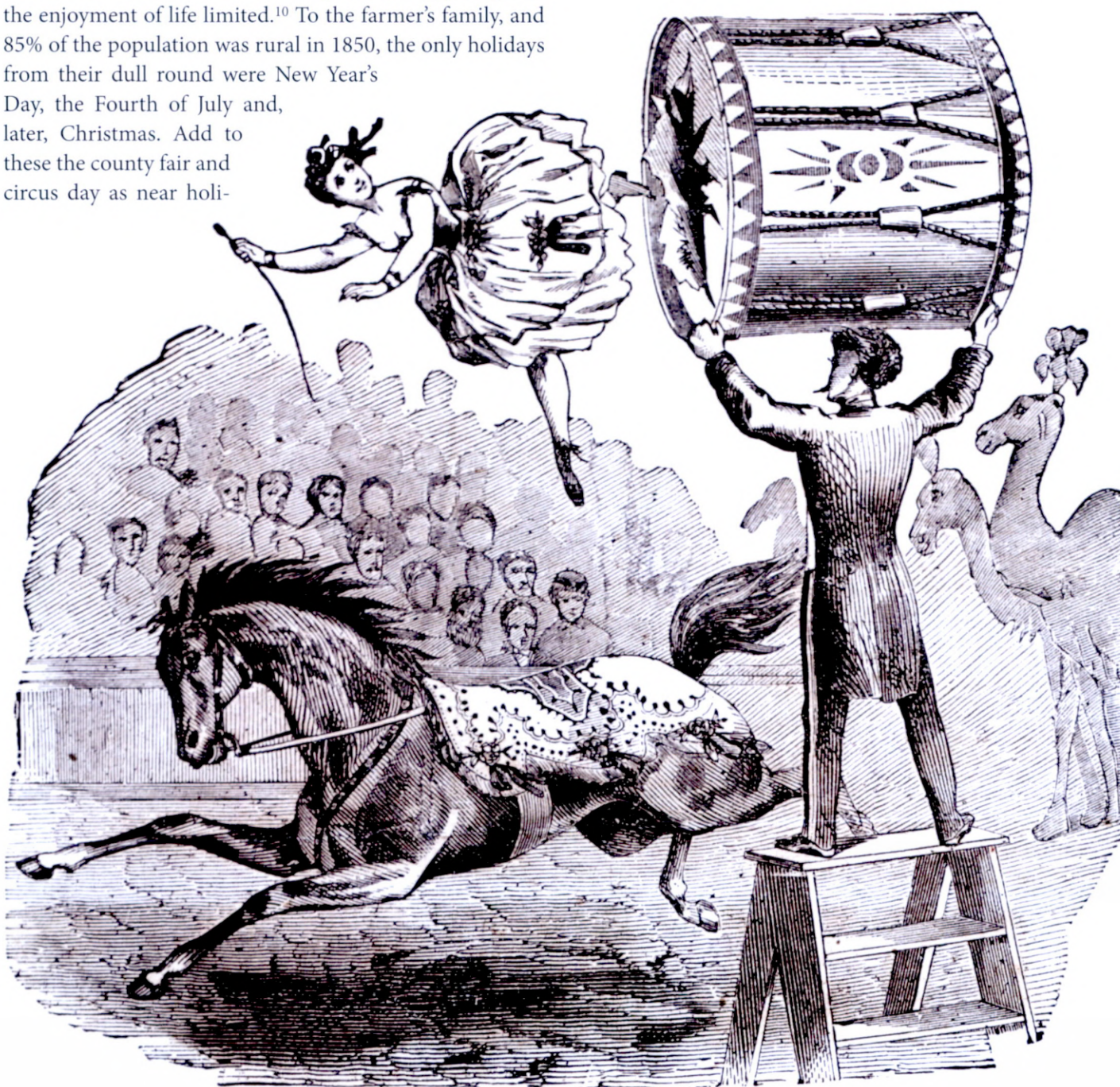
Robie Macauley wrote: "We are all very lucky not to have been born as ordinary Americans in the 19th century. An immense percentage of life had to be devoted to sheer work and drudgery. How infrequent and scant were any pleasures."⁹

Carl Bode agreed when he said that by today's standards leisure was rare, the workday forbiddingly long and the enjoyment of life limited.¹⁰ To the farmer's family, and 85% of the population was rural in 1850, the only holidays from their dull round were New Year's Day, the Fourth of July and, later, Christmas. Add to these the county fair and circus day as near holi-

days, at least respite from work, and one can see how the Sabbath, if it was kept, would be anticipated for its idleness alone.

So, when a resolution such as the one passed by a Vermont congregation read that attendance upon circus exhibitions encouraged a set of idlers, spendthrifts and debauchers and created a resort of the loose, the idle and the wicked, it is not surprising that it was not adhered to by all the members.¹¹

In addition, the circus mirrored virtues understood



and accepted by the rural population. Such things as courage and physical strength and the intuitive knowledge of animals, as well as a complete mastery of the animals appealed to these people. And following a formula that emphasized these qualities is what kept the circus in the forefront of 19th century American culture. The audience understood the natural world and the circus reflected that world.

Years later, the poet Joyce Kilmer wrote: "The press agent may, without fear of contradiction, call the circus religious. In the old days he frequently called it a 'moral exhibition.' This was to forestall or answer the attacks of the Puritan divines of New England, who railed against the great canvas monster which invaded the sanctity of their villages.

"'Moral' was justly used. For surely courage, patience and industry are the three qualities most obviously exhibited by the silk and spangle-clad men and women who dance on the perilous wire, fly through space on swiftly swinging bars and teach a spaniel's tricks to the man-eating lion."

We must not assume that the populace turned their backs on the reformers and that it ended there. The bias toward popular entertainment continued in one form or another and does to this day. But, essentially, by the last quarter of the 19th century the circus had achieved a position in the culture too important for it to be considered immoral. And, in the years before the Civil War, when the reform movement was strongest, other issues came to occupy the men of persuasion in the society. Temperance and the abolition of slavery became more important to them than whether or not people paid their bills before they went to the circus. Prosperity changed attitudes – a full pocketbook is the greatest enemy of reform. The attitudes toward



money and what should be bought with it also changed. As the churches became more wealthy their economic arguments lost their validity. And all these arguments were larger than just New England, they were national concerns. The Yankee's voice was but one among many.

I don't think we refer to Yankees as an ethnic group today. We speak of Yankee traits, but they are as often found in Missouri as in Vermont; I think they are mainly the conservative attitudes of rural people anywhere. I know that some of my former neighbors in Maine take delight in pointing out the odd behavior of tourists, but since so many of the tourists are from Connecticut or Massachusetts it's a bit difficult to assign these remarks to Yankee chauvinism. But there definitely was a Yankee at one time, apart from everyone else. I can recall my father telling of when, as a boy, he asked his mother what nationality our family was. Her reply was that we were Yankees. That settled it for her.

I think that as the nation grew and people travelled about they found local customs and regional attitudes to be of interest and so they commented upon them, mostly in print. Certainly, the circus travelled as much as any institution and the Yankee was a type to the showmen, just as were Irishmen, blacks, Cajuns and Indians. We find tales in the literature speaking to the supposed peculiarities of all these groups.

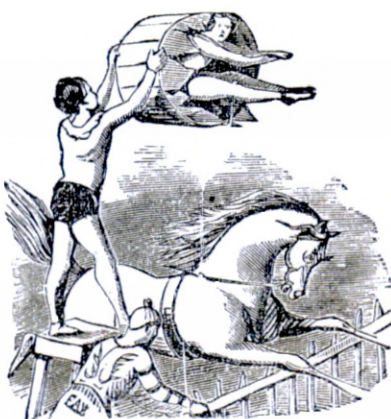
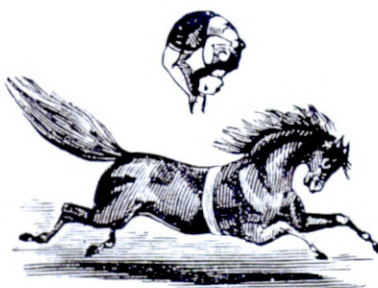
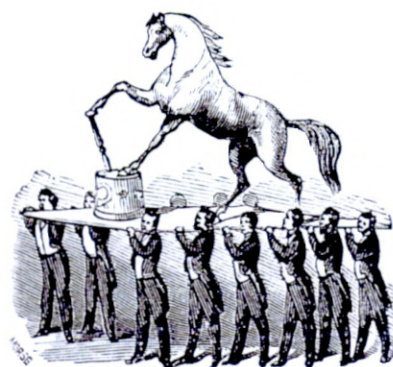
W. C. Coup was the manager of several circuses, including six years at the helm of P. T. Barnum's show. In his autobiography he told this story: "Just after the war many southerners regarded a Yankee as an unending wonder. They had heard so much of Yankee ingenuity that they came to regard a Northerner as a curiosity.

We advertised that we had with our show a number of Yankees from various states. The crier dilated upon the wonderful ingenuity of the Yankee and told the people that if they had any old clocks or other things which needed fixing that they might bring them and watch the Yankees fix them. Our first attempt to put this scheme into operation turned out somewhat disastrously. It was Saturday and the people flocked to the Yankees. When they saw, however, that the Yankees are a good deal like other people we narrowly escaped a riot."¹²

In time, as we know, the Yankee was less of a curiosity, but his habits persisted and showmen were aware of them. For one thing, the vaunted thriftiness of New Englanders affected their show-going proclivities. Advertised wonders meant nothing to them; they didn't patronize shows they didn't know.

Walter L. Main was a circus owner for over 40 years and he once observed that he had seen plenty of shows go on the rocks way down east, so many he couldn't recall all the names. Experience taught him that every circus that invaded the New England states lost money unless they had built a reputation over time. The Yankees will not go to the circus unless they have confidence, he said.¹³

P. T. Barnum's circus planned a circuit of Maine in 1871, but had to cancel it after a few performances because the towns were not large enough to provide audiences that would pay the cost of appearing. Barnum's show had 300 employees, about 250 horses and 100 wagons. Imagine a caravan of that size descending on a small New England village. The circus advertised by posting bills within 75 miles of its intended stands and the railroads ran very profitable excursion trains to the



show grounds. In Waterville, Maine, for instance two, 25 car trains came from Bangor and Belfast to just about double Waterville's population for the day. The picture of humanity that this event brings to mind indicates what a gala affair circus day had become.

It was this circus, Barnum's, that in 1872 went to rail transportation in an attempt to show only in larger places, a premise not available to them when their movements were limited to the distance horses could walk in a day. It was at this time that the first distinctions were made between large towns and small towns.

Maine, of course, is still a place of small population and a poor economic climate. It gained early on the reputation of a poor show state and had to be content with visits by smaller shows. But the rest of New England, once they repealed their laws against the circus, proved to be a good place in which to perform. There were excellent roads, a fine railroad network and a large industrial base, the workers in which have traditionally supported popular entertainment.

Barnum and others advertised themselves as operating "great moral shows" just as Joyce Kilmer pointed out. They used the endorsements of clergymen in their ads and admitted clergymen and their families free of charge. To be moral was to be acceptable and it would be difficult to find immorality in something as unpretentious as the circus. No politics, no nationality, no grossness were allowed to flower there, except those that were generally accepted. Patriotism, chauvinism and love of animals were exalted. Muscular strength and athletic ability, which, as we said, were the very things the audience admired, were the centerpieces of the performance. And it was these values unchanged in the

circus over the years that eventually left the institution with a largely rural audience, in the sense that sophisticated people turned to other things. Today it has regressed even further on the cultural spectrum, being primarily an entertainment for children.

Aside from the objections based on religious principles and those rising from the inclusion of the circus with all popular amusements, there were 19th century objections to ladies in tights and the crude, though never obscene, bantering of the clowns. It became the usual thing for a circus to include in their advertisements a phrase such as, "The Manager, in soliciting the public patronage, would respectfully state that nothing will be introduced in the performance that can in the least offend the most delicate and fastidious persons, but the whole will be conducted with that order and respectability calculated to insure the patronage of a genteel society."

As for ladies in tights, the city fathers of Pittsburgh passed an ordinance in 1840 forbidding their appearance and several circuses rather proudly, it seems to me, advertised that no women were on their roster. These were short lived objections, for some reason.

Here is the attitude of the editor of an 1847 Amesbury, Massachusetts newspaper: "We have made fruitless efforts to think of some good which may result from the circus. But we find nothing in such performances which can by any possibility promote the moral, industrial, physical or pecuniary well-being of humanity.

"In the first place we find about a score of able-bodied men who in no way add to the wealth of the country – not even the worth of a potato. Who do nothing to increase the amount of intelligence – and who do nothing towards elevating public morals [or] refining the manners of the people.

"And, finally, they carried from this village money enough to have purchased a good course of scientific lectures for the coming winter, or to have purchased a very good library."¹⁴

It would seem that asking the circus to elevate public morals or refine the manners of the locals was a bit too much to expect from something as unpretentious as a circus. However, this editorial expresses an intellectual attitude, not the polemic of virtue in the examples we've used, but based on the needs of the society. We see the same arguments today in relation to whether money should be spent on weapons or welfare. As such, these attitudes go beyond New England. They can be found in newspapers across the country in the last half of that century.

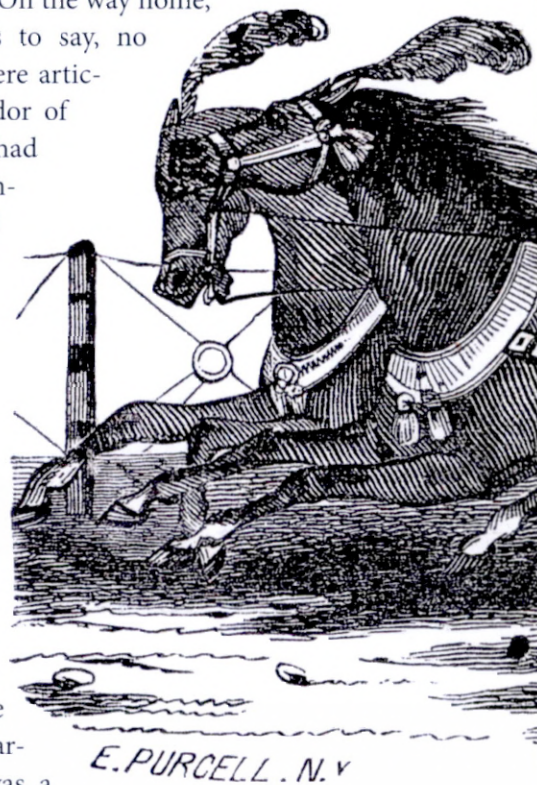
The Industrial Revolution brought New England up-to-date, brought its views in line with the rest of the nation. The old ethics were strained, as Miller said, by a shuffling and restless society finding quick ways to wealth.

Yankee prejudice disappeared in the face of such yearnings, overpowered, we might say, by the acceptance of the circus and the skills it honored which were based on the national psyche. Rural America in the 19th century took on mythic proportions. Henry Nash Smith phrased it as the independent farmer drawing upon his own resources. By his virtue and his will power and by his drawing upon the benevolence of nature he stood as the hero of a manifest destiny.¹⁵

We've tried to show that the circus was a mirror of all this. We spoke of Barnum's show advertising 75 miles from the show grounds. They put up "flaming bills" as a contemporary phrase had it, large and colorful posters depicting the marvels of Asia and Africa and Europe. Full-page newspaper ads and couriers and handbills by the thousands trumpeted the wonders to be seen on circus day. And they arrived with their herds of elephants, strings of beautiful horses, trains of gaudily painted wagons and the athletes and pretty women and funny clowns who were its human symbols. Think of the effect of all that glorious experience on persons of that simpler time.

Hamlin Garland spoke of a country boy's reaction to it in these words: "On the way home, he had no words to say, no thoughts which were articulate.... The splendor of the pageant which had come and gone lingered in his world like the memory of gold and crimson clouds at sunset."¹⁶

It was an age of opulence and splendor and the circus was very much a part of it. In the face of its attractions these objections we have alluded to, these arguments that it was a



waste of time and a waste of money and led one to associate with low company became poor arguments, indeed. The Yankee divines and the purposeful businessmen simply had to stand aside and let the show go on. **Bw**

Endnotes

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3. Stuart Thayer, "Anti-Circus Laws in Connecticut, 1773 - 1840": *Bandwagon*, xx, i, (1976), p. 18.
4. Stuart Thayer, "Legislating the Shows: Vermont, 1824-1933," *Bandwagon*, xxv, iv, (1981), p.20.
5. Michael Chevalier, *Society, Manners and Politics in the United States*, (Paris, 1836, reprinted Ithaca, 1969), p. 107.
6. Henry Ward Beecher, *Lectures to Young Men*, (New York, 1873), p. 178.
7. Douglas T. Miller, *The Birth of Modern America, 1820-1850*, (New York, 1970), p. 80.
8. *Republican Journal*, (Belfast, Maine), November 19, 1847.
9. Robie Macauley, "Dusty Relics," *New Republic*, September, 1972.
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12. William C. Coup, *Sawdust and Spangles*, (New York, 1901), p. 235.
13. Walter L. Main, undated letter in *Billboard*, (n.d.), Pfening Archives, Columbus, Ohio.
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Madame Louise Tourniaire and Her Family

by John Daniel Draper



Charles H. Smith & Co. New York

1877

MR. TOURNIAIRE,
and the other Kings of the Circus

First published in Bandwagon September/October 1986.

Of all the prominent Tourniaire equestrians, undoubtedly the foremost was Madame Louise Tourniaire (1825-1901) who was really a member of the family by marriage only. The surname is quite often misspelled as Tournaire, which then changes to Turnaire, Tournine, Tournour and finally Turnour, the latter being the actual name of the famous clown, Jules, who was not of this family.

Madame was born Louise Ciseck or Zhieskick and, after being apprenticed to the family in Europe as a child rider at the age of five, was later married to Francois Tourniaire. She had three brothers – Benoit, Theodore and Ferdinand Ciseck – pupils of Francois Tourniaire, all of whom were good riders who took the Tourniaire name. Her brother Benoit, who was known as Mons. Benoit or Benoist, should not be confused with her brother-in-law Benoit Tourniaire nor should Ferdinand Ciseck be confused with Ferdinand Tourniaire. Louise had two daughters, Josephine Tourniaire DeMott and the celebrated little Mollie Brown. The former of these was the mother of Josie DeMott (Mrs. Charles M. Robinson), Louise DeMott (Mrs. Robert D. Stickney, Jr.) and Willie DeMott, all famous riders. There were also five other children.

Jacques Tourniaire, the founder of this dynasty, was born on October 17, 1772 at Grenoble. At the age of 15 he went to Paris where he was engaged in the troupe of Astley and became one of its best riders. When Astley returned to England, Tourniaire continued working in France for some time with Antoine Franconi. In 1801 he began a tour of Europe which took him to Germany where he remained from 1801 until 1815. He and his wife, Philippina Rediger Tourniaire, were both very popular entertainers. She was born in Nancy in 1780 and was known for her sensational Amazon horse act. After 1815 Jacques remained in Russia for several years where he was the director of a circus which was claimed to be the first one ever seen in that vast region of the czars. He died on January 14, 1829, at Koenigsberg and was buried in the Catholic cemetery there.

Philippina (1780-1852) remarried, her second husband being a civil servant named Mayne. She had six children by her first husband – Benoit, Francois, Ernest, Sophie (Madame Louis Fouraux), Louise and Adelaide (the Baroness Henry). By her second husband she had two more sons, Louis and Ferdinand, who assumed the name Tourniaire of

their beau-pere and traveled with circuses in Russia. Louis created the celebrated pas de deux with a young mulatto and was the father of the famous jockey, Phillipe Tourniaire, and of Fanny, who married Eugene Leonard Houcke, a son of the familiar equestrian family from Scandinavia.

Madame Louise Tourniaire was born about 1825 in Germany of a family of acrobats by the name of Ciseck. The girl was taken in charge of the Tourniaires and under their tutelage she first began to ride. In the early 1840s when she appeared in London standing erect while doing the principal act, she was highly acclaimed. The city went wild with admiration for her nerve, daring and grace. A few years later in 1846 the family embarked at Hull for America. This girl became the wife of Francois Tourniaire; then head of the family.

In a career that lasted until 1883, her work in the arena was to impart life, vigor and interest to the circus ring. At one time she was considered the most intrepid female rider in the United States. She was one of the first women to stand on one foot on a cantering horse, balancing herself erect. Her elegant act upon a single bareback steed was truly marvelous. As a bareback rider, she was reputed by her grandson, Willie DeMott, to have jumped over a banner 12 feet wide. At one time she was the reigning belle of the Cirque Napoleon in Paris, being the first female to successfully ride in public the four horse act. Her great bareback act on six horses has seldom – if ever – been surpassed. She would bound from steed to steed in a reckless manner, reining and controlling with the most skillful ease her flying troupe during its utmost speed of flight in magnificent evolutions. She “looked like a leaping cataract horribly beautiful.”

An ad for Ballard, Bailey & Co.'s French Circus at Concord, New Hampshire in 1855 stated: “The fixed eyes, anxious countenances and breathless suspense of thousands of her audiences in Paris, Rome, Vienna, London, New York and the larger cities of the Union, wherein this magic artist has performed, attest to the high reputation of this greatest lady equestrian in the known world. She never had an equal nor will she until the equestrian education of Mlle. Josephine, her favorite pupil, is complete, whose youthful grace and beauty, as well as talent, give strong promise of sharing the renown of her great preceptress.”

Quite early, while still doing the great principal act, Madame Tourniaire also presented her fascinating and famous manège act for which her particular style established a new high standard.

Louise took very good care of her highly trained hors-

Left, Madame Tourniaire performing with her horse Mansor on Circus Renz around 1848.

The Ringling Museum

es. Their sensitive mouths were kept clean and she stroked their coats with white silk handkerchiefs. If there was any dust on them, the groom immediately felt the wrath of her temper, which was terrible. Her snowy white riding gloves were almost spotless at the end of each performance.

Black Diamond, her favorite manège horse, performed a wondrous dance movement in which he simultaneously moved his right fore foot and left hind foot so as to meet under his body. Next, he changed to the other two legs, with a rocking motion, while standing in one spot as the band played *Ten Thousand Miles Away*, the only tune to which he performed. This beautiful black horse with his rider, dressed in black, wearing a sable cockade hat and a scarlet flower in the jacket lapel, had created a sensation in Europe. On the way to America the horse rubbed off a sizable portion of his tail and, on his first appearance in New York, wore an artificial one. As the act progressed and the rocking motion continued, unknown to Louise, the false tail fell off and there was considerable laughter in the audience. Louise was enraged by what she considered to be an insult and she wanted to return to Europe immediately.

The Grand Act Manège of Madame Louise Tourniaire reached its zenith by 1876 on the Montgomery Queen Circus where she presented Rienzi, a coal black thoroughbred. This trick and dancing horse was best adapted to exhibit Madame's particular skill, grace and knowledge of an extensive range of equitation. Faultlessly seated in her side saddle, with tiny whip in hand, she compelled Rienzi to march, trot, gallop, waltz, dance, pirouette, balance, do high leaps and a number of other difficult moves, all evidence of complete and masterful control.

The first record of the Tourniaire family in America was in 1850 when Louise, husband Francois, daughter Josephine and brother Benoit and his wife, Rosaline Stickney, were on James June's American and European Amphitheatre. The other brothers, Theodore, rider and acrobat, and Ferdinand, rider, were also there that year. Mademoiselle Louise was billed as horse trainer and the only equestrienne appearing in America without saddle or bridle, coming from Franconi in Paris and Le Cirque Nationale in Brussels. The great W. F. Wallett was jester for the act. She also did manège riding as did Mlles. Josephine and Rosaline. Mons. Benoit was juggler and rider.

The following year the French Troupe, including Francois and Louise, continued on James M. June & Co., appearing among other places at the New York Amphitheatre at 37 Bowery. Francois starred in the "Courier to St. Petersburg" and Louise was advertised as the greatest fe-

male rider living. Also there were Josephine, Ferdinand, and Theodore Tourniaire. Mons. and Mme. Benoit were on Rufus Welch's Circus, he as a two horse rider and Parisian juggler and she as a rider in the Andalusian entree. In addition, during the 1851 season, Madame Louise Tourniaire was credited with appearing for short periods on J. Nixon's Circus and R. Sands & Co.

At the end of April 1852, Mons. and Louise Tourniaire and Josephine and Madame Benoit closed at R. Sands & Co., having appeared with that show at the New York Amphitheatre since January 2. Later Francois was equestrian director for James M. June's French Circus and Madame Louise Tourniaire was the star equestrienne assisted by Mlle. Josephine in "Tours de Grace" on a single horse. Madame Louise was also advertised in the Philadelphia Public Ledger as being on Welch's National Theater and Circus.

For the new year of 1853 Mons. and Madame Tourniaire as well as Josephine and Ferdinand were featured on R. Sands & Co. at the Bowery Amphitheatre. On June 15th of that year Col. Alvah Mann with Messrs. Moore and Thompson opened the Washington Circus, a canvas show, at the corner of 6th Avenue and 39th Street in New York City. It was still running in September when the new spectacle, "Carnival of Venice", was being presented with a stud of horses and with Madame Tourniaire in her beautiful performance presented at each entertainment.

In June 1854 Whitbeck's Circus at Wellsburg, Virginia featured the Parisian troupe led by Madame Louise Tourniaire and her highly trained dancing and manège horses, Columbus and Chemella. Francois was the equestrian director and Mlles. Josephine and Rosaline (presumably Rosaline) were also in this company. Welch and Lent, for part of the 1854 season, also claimed Mme. Louise as manège rider.

The only information available for 1855 placed Louise on Ballard, Bailey & Co. She was horse trainer, rider and bareback performer. Starting in May of 1856 Ballard, Bailey & Co.'s French Circus, reported as Madame Tourniaire's Great French Circus, proclaimed Louise as the great six horse bareback rider with Mlle. Josephine as her favorite pupil and a model rider. Also, Master Theodore, the hurdle leaper, was in a two horse act with his brother, Master Ferdinand, the best trick rider of his age. Mons. Benoit, the great equestrian gymnast, balanced lights while riding horseback as well as doing cup, ball and plate spinning plus stick dancing. At some period in the same year Madame Louise appeared on Joe Pentland's Circus.

The last mention of Francois Tourniaire appearing

with Louise was in 1857 when they were on Sands, Nathans & Co. along with the juvenile riders, Theodore and Ferdinand. Madame did her bareback act with six horses. For part of that season she was also on L. B. Lent's New York Circus where she was horse trainer and rider of her dancing horses. Her brother, Mons. Benoit, was with George F. Bailey & Co.

The next year Madame Louise Tourniaire was horse trainer and rider on Tourniaire and Whitby's Circus. Her daughter, Josephine, and her three brothers were also there. All were riders and Theodore also did acrobatics.

Sometime in the 1850s Francois and Louise had bought a farm in New Jersey which they used as a winter resting place. Their daughter, Josephine, had been a rider since 1850, having come to the circus from a convent school. She was very shy and would gladly have escaped from the circus back to the school. Even after she married the rider James DeMott in 1861, she appeared with him in the ring – not because of her love for the circus – but because of their genuine love for each other. They hated to be separated. Also at that time the travelling of non-professional members of the family on the show was discouraged. In spite of this situation, Josephine was a good rider, although not great, and was credited with being one of the first to jump through the paper covered hoops called balloons. Madame Tourniaire had desired Josephine to professionally follow in her illustrious steps, but that was not to be.

At this point, a summary of James DeMott's early career might be in order. Born at Troy, New York in 1838, he was of French and German ancestry but neither parent had any circus connections. He ran away from home and joined S. B. Howes' U.S. Circus in 1848. He was apprenticed to William Smith, a four horse rider. The next year he was with John Platt Crain's Co. and in 1850 visited the West Indies under the management of Harry Whitby. James DeMott was on the following shows in the decade of the 1850s: Quick & Co.'s Menagerie (1851); Sands, Quick & Co.'s Circus & Menagerie (1852); Washington Circus in New York City (1853); L. G. Butler's North American Circus (1854); Mabie Bros. Circus (1857). He then joined George F. Bailey & Co. and afterwards, Lent & Sloat, with whom he made a trip to the West Indies. Before he was of age he had established a ring barn in Frankford, Pennsylvania where circus riders were trained and he was known as the "boy prodigy" circus rider.

Madame Tourniaire's second husband was William C. Brown, a circus musician. Around 1860 a daughter was born to this union, Mary (Maria or La Petite Louise Marie),

1857

NIBLO'S GARDEN NIXON & CO'S TROUPE MONDAY, MARCH 21, —AND— DURING THE WEEK Engagement of the great Parisian Artiste, M^{lle}. LOUISE TOURNAIRE



Who will appear on her thorough-bred horse,

KIEL
In L'Ecole a Menage.

M^{lle}. JOSEPHINE
In her Classic Poses.

VAN AMBURGH'S MENAGERIE
TIPPOO SAIB,

All the Equestrians and Athletes.

Doors open at half-past 6. To commence at half-past 7.
TICKETS.....50 CENTS
UPPER BOXES.....25 CENTS
CHILDREN.....25 CENTS

Wednesday and Friday,
Grand Afternoon Performance,
AT TWO O'CLOCK.

NO PERFORMANCE ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON OR EVENING
IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE PHILHARMONIC CONCERT.

An 1859 herald for Nixon & Co's Troupe performing at Niblo's Garden in New York. The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection



LITTLE MOLLIE BROWN.

A carte de visite for Mollie Brown, printed circa 1870.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

popularly known in the circus ring as Miss Mollie Brown. This child was of the same temperament as her mother and became the exciting somersault rider whom her niece, Josie DeMott, always sought to emulate.

During the Civil War period members of the family were with L. B. Lent each year except 1861 and 1862. Mons. Benoit was there in 1860 and in the same year Josephine, Ferdinand and Theodore were with Chiarini. In 1861 Louise and Josephine were on G. F. Bailey & Co. as was James DeMott. This was the year of DeMott's marriage to Josephine. Louise was on L. B. Lent's Circus from November 1863 through 1865. In the latter year was the first appearance of her highly trained manège horse, May Fly, in The Games of the Curriculum. At the same time she was also billed as the only bareback equestrienne ever seen. She was the "Imperial Mistress of the Circle" and "Queen of the Arena," riding without saddle or bridle. She also introduced a school of manège exercises with a superb troupe of five French dancing horses.

Madame Louise Brown's brother, Mons. Benoit, was in Cuba and Mexico in 1864. He was with the Gran Circo de Chiarini and later with Albus's Circus and was on that circus when he died on September 13, 1865 in Havana. He was a great trick rider and juggler on horseback. His wife, Rosaline Stickney (1833-1857), had been a charming principal and manège equestrienne, tall, beautiful and majestic in her equestrianism. They were married in Havana in 1850, the year that she debuted on James M. June's Circus. In her brief career she was referred to as La Belle. She rode with grace and fearlessness, finished her act with leaps through balloons and over banners, and created a sensation as a daring hurdle rider. She was the eldest child of Samuel Peckhill Stickney and was the sister of Robert T. Stickney (1846-1928). Mons. Benoit

and Rosaline were the parents of Rosaline (Crissy) Stickney, who was a famous four horse bareback rider for a number of years on John Robinson's Circus and Adam Forepaugh Circus between 1873 and 1889 and in South America until



MISS MOLLIE BROWN

THE SUPREME EQUESTRIAN QUEEN! *Undisputed Champion of all Champion Bare-back Riders! The Only Lady that ever threw a Backward Somersault from the back of a stark-naked horse while running at full speed!*

\$10,000 CHALLENGE open to the World TO PRODUCE HER EQUAL

This detail from an 1881 herald for the Grand Circus Royal gives some idea of the amazing tricks performed by Mollie Brown.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

1896. After retiring from riding, Crissy for some years presented trained animal acts.

Benoit's brothers, Theodore and Ferdinand, were equestrians of the first order and general performers of superior skill, and Ferdinand's wife, Kate Ormond, was a rider. Ferdinand and Kate appeared together as early as 1864 on Dan Rice's Great Show. She filed for divorce in 1869. Ferdinand, in 1870 on Hemmings, Cooper and Whitby's Show, was billed as the best pad rider in the profession.

The earliest reference to little Mollie Brown was as Marie on L. B. Lent's Equescurriculum in 1865. She was there with her mother who was still listed as Madame Tourniaire. Over the next decade Mollie rapidly developed into a very intrepid rider, being the first woman to turn somersaults on the bareback of a running horse in the ring. This feat after-

wards became a feature in all of her performances. Much of her early practicing of this somersault act was done at the Franklin, New Jersey training barn of Eaton Stone where Louise Tourniaire also trained.

The Elmira *New York Gazette* of July 2, 1873 editorialized on Mollie Brown's act with the O'Brien Circus: "Old and experienced circus riders consider it quite a feat to turn somersaults on a horse going at full speed but here is a young girl 12 years old, the only female who has the bravery and skill to accomplish it, performing the feat with an ease and grace that call forth the most enthusiastic applause."

With all of her ability and even after she had become one of the greatest riders of her day, there were instances when Mollie Brown would be called upon to show her de-

termination and courage in adversity. On one occasion, during the final fanfare of the band, she slipped and fell from the back of her white rosinback into the mud and shavings of the ring. Her mother, watching from the back door, ran to the side of the crumpled little figure who was sobbing woefully with a broken arm. Madame Tourniaire assured her that they must take care of the injury, but first Mollie had to finish her act. That is exactly what she did.

In 1878 there was a 10 year old apprentice named Katie Brown who was travelling on O'Brien's Circus at the same time that Mollie and her parents were there. As the show came into Frankford, Pennsylvania the child equestrienne was taken from the train by the Society to Protect Children from Cruelty and returned to her mother, a Mrs. Coles. She was sent back to school because she came under a new law that prevented the training of children under 16 years of age for public performances. Undoubtedly she had been under the tutelage of Madame Louise Tourniaire Brown. This circumstance is interesting in light of the fact that Louise, herself, had been an apprentice at the age of five. Also, this was the year of Mollie Brown's marriage clandestinely to Clarence Farrell, who was for many years treasurer of Frank A. Robbins' Shows. In about two years Madame Louise was to retire as manège and side saddle equestrienne on Batcheller & Doris' Circus.

Madame Louise Brown died at Philadelphia in April of 1901. After her retirement, she and her husband, who died two years before, had lived in Frankford, Pennsylvania. There she continued to be until the day of her death, always visited by performers from everywhere and known to all as the "mother of the profession."

Her daughter, Mollie Brown, considered by many in her day to be the world's greatest bareback rider, died in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on January 9, 1924. Her second husband was James J. Files, a non-professional. Two daughters, Louise and Viola, survived their mother.

Meanwhile, James and Josephine Tourniaire DeMott pursued their own circus careers although their path would overlap that of Madame Louise on Campbell's Caravan & Circus in 1870 and on Sheldenberger's Circus in 1871. Josephine, who quite obviously did not live up professionally to her mother's expectations, had an equestrian career that extended from 1850 to the 1870s. She died in 1920 at the home of her daughter, Camille. Her husband, James DeMott, father of the DeMott Family, who began his circus riding with S. B. Howes at the age of 10, served on a number of the O'Brien shows, notably in 1869 to 1871, 1875 to 1876 and in 1882, quite often as a manager. He was also a

circus proprietor in 1868 (DeMott and Ward) and in 1880 (Hilliard and DeMott). In a number of other years he was a manager – 1878, 1879 and 1881. From 1884 until 1892, nearly until the time of his retirement, he was ringmaster with John Robinson's Circus. During his earlier riding career he had been variously billed as the leading bareback equestrian of the hemisphere (in 1867 on Adam Forepaugh after James Robinson had left) and as the winged Mercury (on DeMott and Ward's Circus & Menagerie in 1868). Highly respected and honored, he died at Frankford, Pennsylvania in 1902. It was to her father that Josie DeMott Robinson dedicated her 1925 book, *The Circus Lady*.

The eldest son of the DeMotts died in 1868 aged about five. Of a family of eight children, three in particular became famous riders: Josie (circa 1868-1948), Louise (circa 1873-1946) and William (August 22, 1869-1945).

Josie DeMott was reputed to be the second woman to do the backward somersault on the bare back of a moving horse and was also the first woman to perfect the shoulder stand from a horse circling the ring. Never more than five feet tall and weighing something less than one hundred pounds, she began her career of principal riding around the age of six in 1874.

In her interesting volume *The Circus Lady*, she explained how she learned the difficult bareback somersaulting act. "On the ground I could turn them all day but here some strange sensation took hold of me as I stood on the horse's back that took all the desire to do the trick from me ... I kept riding around, every now and then sitting down, as if I were trying something new, but before long it was evident to the onlookers that I was scared. My father called to ask me if I was frightened and I said, of course. I was not, but the horse was not galloping close enough and he acted as if he was going to shy, besides. As a matter of fact, I was feeling something I had never felt before, not only of growing shame at my plight, but real fear that clutched me all through. But my father was still looking at me. I jumped and I jumped, but alas not over. Finally my father stopped the horse and told me to try it while the horse stood still. Even then I could not."

Her father was now disgusted and wanted to give up the attempt, but she asked for one more chance. If she failed after three times around the ring she would quit.

"So I went around once, I went around twice. I heard my father call one, two. Then suddenly, at the third turn, over I went in a real somersault and after that I turned as many of them as I wanted."

Marrying Charles Robinson, treasurer of John Robin-



In 1884 Strobridge Lithographing Company printed a poster for the Barnum & London circus featuring Mollie Brown.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

son 10 Big Shows on March 6, 1891, she retired from the circus in order to help his political career in Ohio and to go with him on the gold rush to Alaska. After a lapse of 15 years she returned to the sawdust ring with Barnum & Bailey for 1905 to 1907 where, with the help of her brother, she again took up where she had left off with her somersault riding. She trained on her new rosinback horse, "My Joe," which had been used to pull a milk wagon. While presenting her act the horse cut across the ring as she was in the air and her knee twisted as she came down on the wooden ring curb. She eventually completed the season and the two following seasons before she again retired on the urging of her mother. Eventually she sold the beloved "My Joe" to May Wirth when the Wirths were living at the Robinson home.

During her illustrious career, which was mostly on John Robinson's Circus, she spent the winter of 1888-89

with Orrin Bros. in Mexico, where she was personally honored by President Diaz. The following winter she and her brother, William DeMott, were among the cream of the circus acts that appeared at Olympia in London with the Barnum and Bailey Circus.

Mary Brewster, in writing of Josie in 1927, pointed out: "The code of its people (circus people) may be simpler – anyway it is more direct – than that of a more superficial society, but among them the shoddy in performance does not pass.

"No aristocracy has more earned its eminence. And though she has experienced so many other phases of existence since she first won her girlhood distinction as one of the most skilled and daring bareback riders of the world, in Josephine DeMott one encounters the true circus aristocrat."



Josie DeMott, the granddaughter of Louise Tourniaire was a featured act on her father's circus in 1881. The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

William DeMott became a consummate principal, hurdle and somersault rider. His career extended from 1874 until 1925. He seemed to never grow old in the riding profession. His first wife, Katie Smith, a non-professional at the time of their marriage, was taught to ride a superb manège act on the spotted Arabian stallion "Sultan" with Ringling Bros. Circus in 1896. His second wife, Eunice Stokes DeMott, who survived him, was a principal rider performing with him as early as 1910 and 1911. She also rode manège and did a double carrying act with her husband. After their

riding careers were at an end, they conducted a school of dance and acrobatics in Baltimore, Maryland.

Louise DeMott, the younger sister, began her career on John Robinson's Circus in both principal riding acts and manège. After her marriage to Robert D. Stickney in 1893, she and her husband usually appeared on the same program. Later she concentrated on manège, both from the side saddle and from the 4-wheeled buggy or cart. She could do wonderful and beautifully executed feats in side saddle maneuvers. By 1909 Louise Stickney, then on Hagenbeck-Wallace, was one of the best known performers in the circus world. She entered the arena dressed all in white, riding in a high seated 4-wheeled cart, drawn by a milk white horse with a cake walking white dog performing underneath. The audience always regarded the act with hearty applause. On leaving the circus, she and her husband appeared on the Keith circuit of Vaudeville. By 1923 they retired to North Platte, Nebraska where Robert was engaged in breaking high school and trick horses for a big horse dealer in that city.

In 1933 Robert D. Stickney, the first grandson of John Robinson and also a grandson of Sam P. Stickney, was running a Phillips gasoline station in Des Moines, Iowa. He died in 1941 and Louise retired in Des Moines with her son until her death in 1946.

A word of appreciation is due to the members of the staff of the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin for the use of their facilities and most particularly to

Robert L. Parkinson, Research Director, for his continued enthusiastic encouragement and technical assistance. The references for this article were obtained chiefly from the *New York Clipper*, the *Billboard* and newspaper ads for the various circuses involved.

The author retired as a professor of chemistry at Bethany College in West Virginia. He went on to prepare a listing of biographical information concerning thousands of circus equestrians in America and Europe dating to the 18th century. **BW**

What Goes Up ...

by William Slout

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This stock poster, created by Calhoun Print circa 1890, could have been used by any of the numerous traveling shows that featured the daring balloon ascensions.

The Ringling Museum,
Tibbals Collection

First Published in Bandwagon March/April 1996 and originally presented at the CHS convention in San Antonio, Texas on October 19, 1995.

The balloon ascension as a free exhibition to attract the public to American circuses was inaugurated in 1870. Previous to this, a pre-performance ballyhoo for many shows consisted of a parade through town, eventually ending up in front of the canvas pavilion. As the improvement of roads allowed circuses to travel with larger wagons and heavier equipment, parades became more elaborate and more spectacular. Band chariots, wagons exhibiting the contemporary lion kings and their beasts, huge and ornate pageantries on wheels, 30 and 40 horse hitches, elephants and camels in harness, mechanical music rigs – all contributed at one time or another to the great advertising caravan.

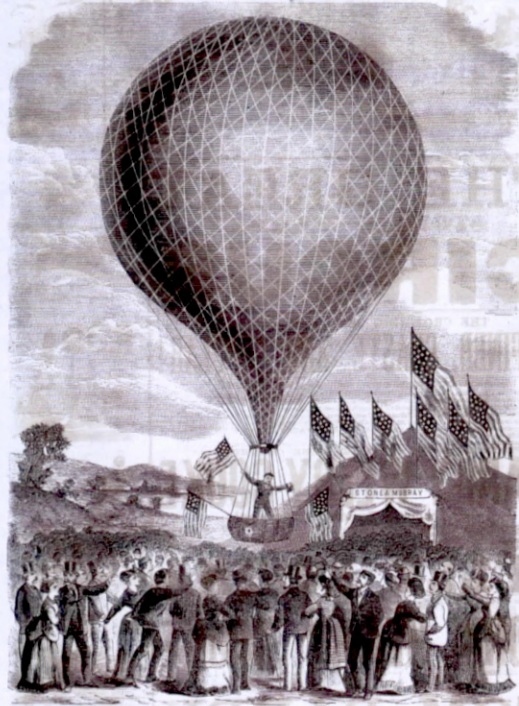
During an age when every town had their own local band and a bandstand was a symbol of pride in most every village park, band music on the circus lot was another means of attracting a crowd. Every show of reasonable size carried at least one group of uniformed musicians, the brass band being the loudest and thereby the most useful. In time, the musicians were augmented by mechanical devices. Spalding & Rogers brought out the Apollonicon in 1849, and Nixon & Kemp introduced the calliope in 1857, both oddities of their day capable of drawing avid public attention.

Another popular free act prior to the introduction of balloons was the daily ascension of a wire-walker from ground level to the tent's center pole. This device appears to have been inaugurated around 1856 when Sands' circus presented Mlle. Isabelle, who walked the wire a distance of some 300 feet. The following year there were at least five other shows exhibiting a similar act.¹ And not to be outdone, the creative Yankee Robinson featured the handsome young horse, Black Hawk, in 1857, trained to walk a plank on the perilous journey to the top of the tent, this according to Robert Dingess in his unpublished manuscript.

But at a time when airplanes were unheard of and the urge to emulate the magical flight of birds was a sometime youthful dream during the inevitable journey toward maturity, the phenomenon of a large balloon, filled with hot air, rising from the earth and carrying a man skyward was an awesome spectacle for people living in a horse-drawn century. And circus

Right, stamped for the May 10, 1871 show at New London, Connecticut, this herald for the Stone & Murray circus demonstrates how important the ascensions were in creating excitement for the show. The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

**THE GREAT
STONE & MURRAY CIRCUS**



**GRATUITOUS
BALLOON ASCENSION**
A JOURNEY BEYOND THE CLOUDS!

As an immense outlet of Capital, this Novel and Thrilling Ascension, THE EVENT OF THE PERIOD, has been secured by this popular, extensive and reliable establishment.

EVERY DAY OF EXHIBITION, at precisely ONE O'CLOCK, P. M.
PROF. J. W. HAYDEN,
The distinguished FRENCH AERONAUT, who holds, OUTSIDE OF THE CIRCUS PAVILION, and FREE TO ALL, the right to see it.

A PERILOUS BALLOON ASCENSION!
The issue of this Intrepid Ascensionist is well-ride, and, having made many thousand aerial journeys, he is now the greatest and MOST CELEBRATED MID-AIR VOYAGEUR IN THE WORLD!

The entirely new and lately invented method of inflation is used, and all are invited to assist! Experience an exciting power of about 20,000 pounds, sending the Monster, heavenward, within three hours of the receipt of the order, and BEYOND THE VISION OF MORTAL EYE.

To guard against accidents, six of these MONSTER-LIKE AIR-SHIPS have been constructed, and will be coiled with the Great Stone & Murray Circus tent.

AN ASCENSION EVERY DAY
These mammoth Balloons are four acres in size, and from forty to fifty in diameter, and go skyward to an altitude of miles, no matter how inclement the climate. Neither STORM, WIND, NOR RAIN can interfere to prevent the thrilling exhibition.

Perhaps another such opportunity to behold this grand skyward journey may never again occur along the route of this great enterprise. Hence, let all who wish, behold it now. The method lately used by the celebrated French to transport messages over the heads of the VICTORIOUS AND WONDER-STROCK PRUSSIAN! who could command no weapons with which to interrupt the system of communication.

A GIGANTIC MASS OF AIR-BORNE CANVAS!
Impelled upward, through the sacred agency of some mysterious and incomprehensible power.

SEE IT, EVERYBODY. AND MARVEL AT THIS
EPOCH IN AN AGE OF SENSATION!

KEEP AN EYE ON DATE
WHICH SEE THE OTHER STARS

proprietors eventually came to understand this.

The hot air balloon was first launched successfully in 1783 in France by the Montgolfier brothers. Their observation that smoke rose into the air was the basis for experimentation with lighter-than-air craft. The original tests were naturally primitive. No passengers were sent aloft and the prototype did not achieve a great distance, but the theory was confirmed.

If at this early stage there were no logical uses for the balloon there was at least a curiosity value. Balloons became objects for exhibition and intrepid aeronauts the exhibitionists. On January 9, 1793, Jean Pierre Blanchard, one of the earliest of American aeronauts, ascended from the yard of the Walnut Street prison in Philadelphia. President George Washington and an assemblage of dignitaries watched the hydrogen-filled balloon rise to over 5,000 feet and disappear in its travel of 15 miles before alighting into a patch of woods near Woodbury, New Jersey. The craft carried Blanchard, his black dog, and a letter of introduction from the President – it being the first piece of air mail on the America continent. This was Blanchard's 45th ascension but his first on our side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Blanchard, a native of France, had even at a young age an inventor's curiosity. As early as 1781 he constructed a flying machine fashioned after the manner of birds in flight, having four huge wings operated by hand and foot levers. The contraption was, of course, a failure. But once the Montgolfier brothers had proven the principle of lighter than air flight, Blanchard wasted no time in accepting the balloon as a legitimate device for exhibition and experimentation and in the ensuing years made 44 flights throughout the European continent. His greatest triumph, however, eight years before coming to America, occurred when he crossed the English Channel with Dr. John Jeffries of Boston. This was the first air voyage between nations, hailed "the eighth wonder of the world."²

The channel crossing occurred on January 7, 1785. It goes unexplained how Blanchard and Jeffries came to be partners in this historic channel crossing. Nevertheless, at 8:00 A.M. the balloon ascended over the white cliffs of Dover, a tribute to Blanchard's imagination. The gondola, shaped like a bathtub, had a rear fin and four winglike

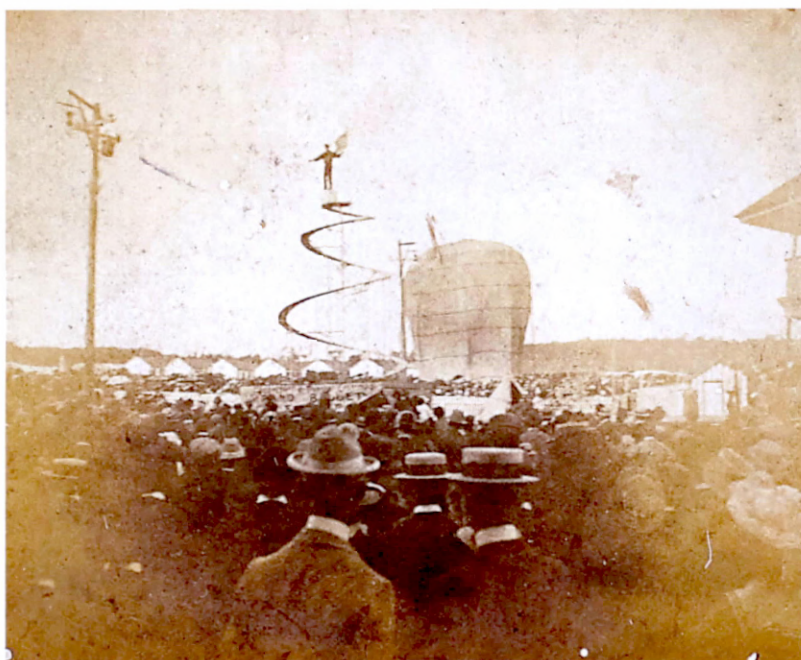


A photograph of a balloon ascending over an assembled crowd, likely with the Mat Wixom Circus circa 1890.

Circus World Museum

rudders, attachments intended to steer and propel the balloon. Blanchard was seemingly unaware that the airship was solely subject to the whim and fancy of the wind and not human guidance. The flight, which was fraught with hair raising events too lengthy to go into here, terminated shortly after three o'clock in the afternoon in a wooded area not far from Calais. The heroes of the treacherous crossing – unlike Lindbergh almost a century and a half later – landed inauspiciously, with no cheering well-wishers, no champagne, no flags unfurled.³

Returning to the Philadelphia of 1793, one might wonder why anyone would choose to do anything within the walls of a prison. But to Blanchard, enclosure of the Walnut Street prison was essential for at least two reasons. It protected his equipment from mettlesome curiosity seekers and it allowed him to charge an admission fee for observing the preparation and take-off of his balloon. Then, too, the open space of the prison yard was free of encumbering trees and other objects that might interfere with the early stage of ascent. And there was always the danger of fire or explosion during the time when the balloon was being readied. A newspaper item of the day read in part: "It is hoped that the spectators may not crowd too near, or interrupt Mr. Blanchard whilst employed in his preparations, as it might be attended with fatal effects, should he be incommoded."⁴



Photographed in Sherbrooke, Quebec around 1875, these two photos show a balloon inflating beside other outdoor entertainments.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection



quadrupeds a safe flotation earthward. A contemporary account relates that the wind was in a southeasterly direction when the balloon left the ground. As it passed over Bush Hill at an altitude of 500 feet the parachute was detached. The balloon then floated in the direction of Gloucester Point and the chute in the direction of Frankford, the future home of John O'Brien's circus enterprises.⁶ This ascension at Rickett's Amphitheatre marked the first balloon act with an American circus.

It appears that many of these spectators intended to follow the floating balloon on horseback, attempting to keep apace as best they could. In an open letter to the newspaper, Blanchard explained: "You wish to know...where you may order your horses to stand that you may without losing time follow the aerostat. If the day is calm, there will be full time to leave the prison court without precipitation as in that case I shall ascend perpendicularly; but if the wind blows, permit me, gentlemen, to advise you not to attempt following, for the swiftest horses will be unable to keep up with me, especially in a country so intersected with rivers and so covered with woods."⁵

A short time after Blanchard's first American voyage, he was given permission to construct a rotunda on the Governor's lot on Chestnut Street, where he exhibited the balloon being prepared for his 46th flight. But without the protection of prison walls, the vulnerable aircraft was damaged by stones thrown from the outside.

During this time, in this very city, John Bill Ricketts was conducting a circus on the corner of Twelfth and Market Streets. Here, sometime during 1793, Blanchard sent up a balloon with a parachute attached containing a cat and a monkey. Some form of slow ignition was rigged to release the parachute at a certain altitude, which allowed the

I am indebted to Stuart Thayer for another event concerning an early circus balloon ascension. An announcement in a Nashville, Tennessee paper told of such an occurrence for Messrs. Myers and Johnstone's benefit with J. Purdy Brown's circus on December 26, 1827. Thayer also sent me an item from the Cincinnati *Daily Enquirer* of 1853 which, although it has little to do with this narrative, I cannot resist including here. On April 24 of that year the paper announced an exhibition called Diehl & Co.'s Hydrogen Menagerie. The animals were all composed of silk cloth inflated with gas and all were somewhat animated and capable of performing tricks. The elephant was 21 feet high and 18 feet long. Among other objects, there was a whale some 30 feet in length and a giant 21 feet in height, all seemingly representing an early prelude to similar objects used in Macy's annual Christmas parade. In conjunction with this tented attraction was an ascensionist, W. M. Paulin,




and fireworks were conducted by Mr. Diehl, advertised as the "celebrated pyrotechnist."⁷

Perhaps the first time a balloon was put to practical use occurred with its introduction by the Union Army early in the Civil War. On June 17, 1861, Thaddeus Lowe, who had recently flown the 900 miles from Cincinnati to Unionville, South Carolina, demonstrated the effectiveness of his soaring vessel to President Lincoln. With his crew, he ascended aloft for a brief period and communicated with the groundlings by telegraph. The performance must have been impressive to the illustrious observers; for, in time, T.S.C. Lowe's Balloon Corps, consisting of a number of freelance balloonists, was formed to assist the Union Army. Lowe's balloons were put into limited service to aerially observe enemy troop movements and to direct Union artillery. Only a week following his demonstration, Lowe and a sketch artist floated a balloon near a Confederate encampment adjacent to Falls Church, a community near Arlington, Virginia, recording enemy activity for the first time. A month later another of Lowe's ascensionists, John LaMountain, began using balloons for the Federal government at Fort Monroe, near Hampton Roads, Virginia. The forerunner of today's aircraft carrier made an experimental debut on August 3, 1861, when LaMountain launched a balloon from the deck of the ship *Fanny* – which had been especially outfitted for that purpose.

For many of these early balloonists, ascending into the ethers was not simply a dare devil stunt; it was a means of unraveling the science of flight – understanding the ef-

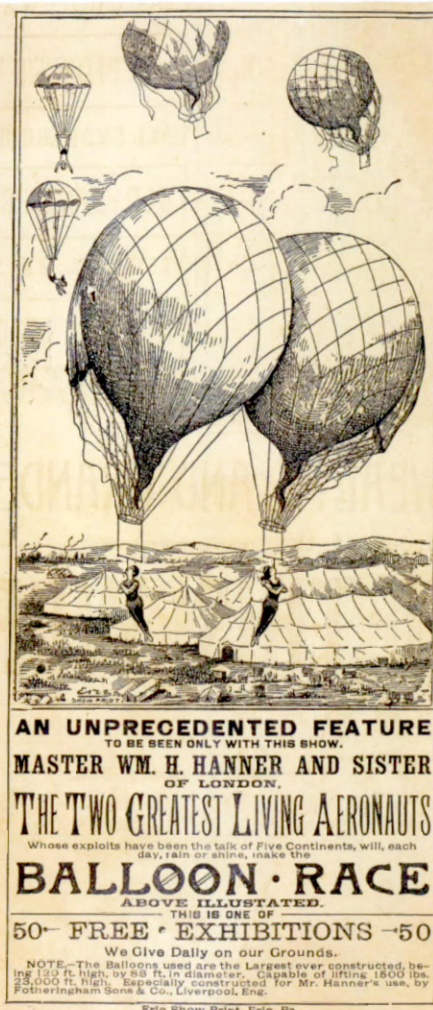
fects of air currents, the problems of elevation, the skill of navigation, and the evolution of balloon structure and building materials. But all of this was expensive. By his own statement, Blanchard's first American flight, which required "4200 weight of vitriolic acid," which was needed for creating hydrogen, was paid for by his "aerial companions in Europe" at a cost of 100 guineas.⁸ And there were of course other expenses. The early solution for raising money was through ticket subscriptions. In Blanchard's case, although the entire population of Philadelphia, from 40,000 to 50,000 people, watched the ascension, the gate receipts totaled a mere \$405.00⁹ The event was observed by nearly the whole of the city outside the prison walls.

It was ultimately discovered that ticket sales was not a feasible means of raising funds. Subsequent aeronauts found it was dangerous to disappoint audiences who had paid their money to see the balloon go up, bad weather being no excuse for cancellation. When a French aeronaut failed to ascend because the wind was close to hurricane level, the Philadelphia citizenry, who had paid to witness the event, broke up his aerial car for souvenirs, shredded his silken balloon, and burned the mansion from which grounds the flight was to be made. This illustrates the passion of curiosity balloon flights created in the 19th century. In addition, charging admission did not pay because it was too easy just to save the money and simply remain at a distance to watch. After all, the real enchantment was seeing the craft in the air, not air being pumped into it.

<h1 style="text-align: center;">1874. G. G. GRADY'S CIRCUS 1874.</h1> <p style="text-align: center;">MUSEUM, MENAGERIE AND GRAND FREE BALLOON SHOW.</p>		
 <p>GRAND! GORGEOUS! GIGANTIC!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">G. G. GRADY'S HIPPODROME, CIRCUS, MUSEUM, MENAGERIE and FREE BALLOON ASCENSION!</p> <p><small>Positively made from the Show Grounds each day, as the Pictorial represents. MAMMOTH TENTS. One Single Ticket admits you to ALL.</small></p> <p><small>The most comprehensive and complete Animal, Aerial and Aeronaut Exhibition of the extraordinary opposition season of 1874.</small></p> <p><small>A Ring Revolution! A Whole Show of Savage Animal Performers.</small></p>	<p>THE QUEEN OF ALL FEMALE GYMNASTS, M^{lle} CLARISSA HUNTING, <small>In her Graceful and Astonishing feats on the Trapeze.</small> The Female Sampson as Champion Club Swinger, MISS NELLIE CLARK, <small>Doing her daring act upon the top of a 25 foot perch, held by</small> <small>GEORGE MENKIN.</small></p> <p><small>The most sensational and daring Free Exhibition of the age by</small> PROF. BURHANS, <small>Who, clinging to a gossamer trapeze, will ascend to the clouds with his mammoth balloon,</small> "EXCELSIOR," <small>from the Show Grounds, and soar through space, the veritable mercury of the aerial bar. See this astounding demonstration of science and courage, for nothing—The man with the Iron Nerve—and then pay almost nothing to see the BEST OF THE BIG SHOWS.</small></p>	 
<p>To Children.--On presentation of this note at the ticket wagon, with 20 cents in change, will purchase a Half Fare Ticket.</p>		

Script good for a child's "half fare" to G. G. Grady's 1874 circus featured Prof. Burhan's ascent to the clouds in his balloon Excelsior.

Circus World Museum



A courier announced the exciting act of Master Wm. H. Hanner and his sister, the "Two Greatest Living Aeronauts" who would be seen in Charles City on May 22, 1893 with the Cook & Whitby Circus. The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

Consequently, the best alternative was to find a sponsor to underwrite the exhibition – a civic celebration, agricultural fair, a commercial promotion, etc. With expenses paid for by the sponsoring organization, the ascension became a free act for the purpose of attracting an audience to an event other than solely the aeronautical feat.

Sometime in the 1820s at William Niblo's famous garden in New York City a Madame Blanchard was "wafted away to the azure vault above town in a balloon."¹⁰ Niblo's Garden was a fashionable evening resort where ice creams and other delicacies were served and nightly entertainments – musical concerts, rope dancing, pyrotechnic displays and other such diversions – were offered. Was this intrepid lady the wife of Jean Pierre? Or was she an opportunist usurping the Blanchard name? Concurrently to her exhibitions, a man by the name of Robertson was ascending from the grounds of the rival Vauxhall Garden. It was

said about that time that "a public garden without a balloon would be as great an anomaly as the theatre without an orchestra."¹¹ These incidents serve as examples of the direction aeronautic exhibitions had taken – an inducement for public congregation.

The balloon ascension became a daily attraction with circuses in the years following the war. The originator appears to be George W. DeHaven's (1837-1902) show of 1870. The practice began with no fanfare and seemingly no thought of it being innovative. The first reference to it in the *New York Clipper* read: "One of the aeronauts connected with DeHaven's Circus was recently severely injured by falling from the balloon into a summer house at Davenport, Iowa, and his substitute was drowned at Dubuque by falling in the river, we are informed."¹²

DeHaven moved about in Iowa, Illinois and Indiana that season. Then, at the end of July, R. E. J. Miles, a Cin-

cinnati theatrical promoter, purchased the circus, which continued to function under the DeHaven banner. (I venture to remark that DeHaven's managerial history could be likened to a locomotive that halted with frequency to take on fuel.) The company traveled the Ohio River on their boat *Victor* until it reached Wheeling, when they transferred to moving on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. At this time it was announced: "A balloon ascension is now made daily in connection with the circus." And a correspondent writing from Camden, South Carolina, where the circus had been, referred to a free balloon ascension prior to the afternoon exhibition.¹³

Balloons for free acts caught on with other circus managers for the 1871 season. Agnes Lake's Hippo-Olympiad was mentioned in the *Clipper* early in January of that year as exhibiting a balloon ascension; but her show may have started the practice in late 1870. By that time, R. E. J. Miles had become managing director for Mrs. Lake, and George W. DeHaven was in advance of the show following the Miles-DeHaven seasonal closing. They apparently carried their propensity for balloon ascensions with them; for at 1:00 P.M. each day, or shortly before the start of Lake's matinee, Prof. J. W. Hayden fired up his equipment and went aloft.¹⁴ The show disbanded for the winter on February 24 at Atlanta, Georgia, and returned to Cincinnati to prepare for an April re-opening; but not before becoming the second circus to travel with an aeronaut as a free attraction.

G. G. Grady's Old Fashioned Circus began the practice in 1871 also. That is when the circus advertised balloon



This carte de visite features the image of an unidentified aeronaut of the late 19th century.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

ascensionist Prof. Terries. This may have been either William or James Terries, both of whom were on the roster as acrobats.¹⁵ Wootten & Haight's Empire City Circus advertised a "Gratuitous Balloon Ascension, Adjoining the Circus Pavilion, at 1 o'clock P.M., prior to the arenic exhibition," with the so-called French aeronaut, Prof. Renno, piloting his monster ball. The ad claimed the circus had eight of these air ships 100 feet high and 60 feet in diameter which allowed them to give daily exhibitions. And finally, James Robinson's Circus, in this same year of 1871, featured the "Celebrated French Aeronaut," Mons. Paul LeGrand.

It appears to me that the early use of balloon ascensions with these companies was, at best, reckless. Unlike the professional flying of such men as Blanchard, Lowe and LaMountain, the early circus ascensionists do not seem to be skilled

aeronauts, but ambitious young men eager to turn a fast dollar, with invented French names and perhaps the added designation of "Professor." Josie DeMott, in the charming book about her life in the circus, characterizes the balloon ascension as "a trick performed by someone with more daring than intelligence." And of the aeronaut, she writes, "He was always nicknamed Ballooney, usually shortened to Looney."¹⁶ As such, the lives of these men were often shortened as well; or, for the more fortunate, filled with narrow escapes. While in Camilla, Georgia, on January 19, 1871, Lake's balloon caught fire as it began to ascend. The occupant escaped injury by swiftly bailing out at an altitude of a mere 35 feet.¹⁷ In Dayton, Ohio on April 21 of that year, just previous to the send-off of G. G. Grady's aeronaut, Terries, who performed on a trapeze bar, the balloon caught

COUP'S EQUESCURRICULUM

EXTRA!

The most Brilliant, Scientific and Scenic EXHIBITION
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

The Heavenly Planets are imitated—forked lightning, rumbling thunder in a clear sky.—Floating clusters of Stars beneath parachutes; Cannonading Balls; streaming Meteors, miles in length, and showers of Golden Rain, will be seen and heard for many miles, floating gracefully beneath the beautiful and vaulted heavens.

PROF. HARRIS'



METEORIC BALLOON

Was first brought to my notice while I was exhibiting in Washington, D. C. He was there making experiments for the Signal Service Department and at my solicitation one of his Balloons was sent up each night as the closing act of my entertainment. The sight was grand and beautiful, exceeding in its spectacular effect anything I had ever previously witnessed. It was seen by Thousands of delighted Citizens.

To have one connected with my Show was my immediate determination, and I have at an enormous cost succeeded in arranging to have it. Dr. Harris being unable himself to travel with me, the arrangement had to be made with Prof. Holden, of London, who had purchased the right to make these ascensions in America. This part of my entertainment will therefore be under that gentleman's management.

The Balloons range in size from ten to forty feet in circumference. The cost of their exhibition is enormous, but I feel warranted, by the princely liberality with which I have thus far been patronized, and because of the intense excitement and delight with which they are witnessed, in incurring the expense.

I can state in truthful earnestness that in my own long experience in the show business, nothing has ever excited the same wonder and delight with which I have witnessed these ascensions.—The magnificence of the display is perfectly marvelous. It eclipses the most gorgeous and beautiful pyrotechnical display that has ever been witnessed.

The Balloon will be inflated under the tent when possible, and in the presence of the audience, and an ascension will be made every evening except when the weather is too unfavorable to make it practicable.

This addition to my show has been made at vast expense.—Besides the Royalty to Prof. Holden, some of the small Balls cost as high as \$15 each, but I don't shrink from that—I have confidence in the public—it will be my aim never to betray that confidence.—I shall maintain the character of the Equescurriculum as the most novel, complete and classic exhibition ever before witnessed in this or any other country.

Respectfully,

W. C. COUP.

WILL EXHIBIT AT

James Reilly, Printer and Engraver, 12, 14 & 16 Spruce Street, N. Y.

DUNN BROS.

fire near its mouth and continued to burn as it rose from the ground. When the air within the bag cooled, the aeronaut descended rapidly but fortunately was able to break the force of his fall by grasping onto a branch of a willow tree. A sprained ankle was his only souvenir.¹⁸ Again in July, when Lake's Hippo-Olympiad was returning from a tour of the West, the *Saline County Journal* of Salina, Kansas, opined: "The balloon ascension was not the greatest success in the world. The balloon ascended but Prof. Miles didn't, and thus was our special artist deprived of a visit to the stars. The parachute must have been indisposed, for the balloon seemed to shoot off before there was a good ready. The 'ship of air' turned a complete somersault after going up a few feet, and caught fire. The fire was speedily extinguished; so was the balloon."¹⁹

The aeronaut for James Robinson, while exhibiting in Louisville, Kentucky on July 12, 1871, had a collapse of the balloon which rapidly fell earthward but fortunately, the craft landed on a rooftop without damage to its passenger.²⁰ Prof. Fisher of G. G. Grady's circus, who had replaced Terries for a reason to be explained later, was lucky during the Pittsburgh stand on August 3, 1871, when, after attaining some 500 feet of altitude, his balloon suddenly dropped and doused him into the Allegheny River, wherein he swam to a nearby sailboat, safe and uninjured.²¹ Again, with James Robinson, in Cincinnati on July 17th, the balloon repeated its erratic behavior, forcing the aeronaut to dive through a friendly second story window of a picture frame factory to safety, which sounds like a spectacular feat in itself. The *Clipper* reporter suggested: "These ascensions with hot air are fool hardy. The man risks his neck every time he goes up."²² Press agent and circus historian, Charles H. Day, has suggested that Stone & Murray used hot air balloons in the early 1870s but abandoned the scheme on account of the frequent accidents to aeronauts and the innumerable bills for damages from the descent of the balloon.²³

These accidents merely delayed the inevitable. A *Clipper* obituary revealed that a Leonardi Torres, who must have been the Terries previously mentioned, a man of about 28 years of age, died on July 22, 1871, making a balloon ascension for G. G. Grady's circus in Massillon, Ohio. While performing aloft on a trapeze, he let loose his grasp to prevent being smothered by the balloon exhaust and fell

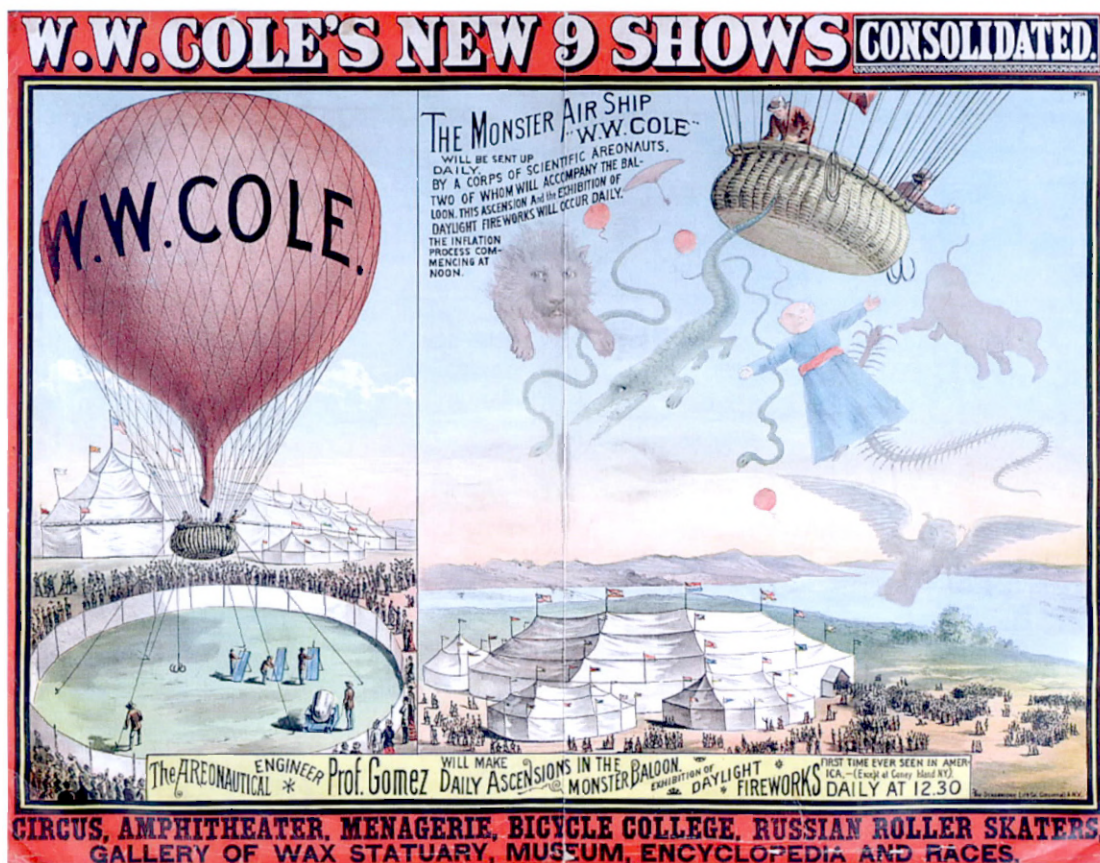
Left, in 1878 W. C. Coup was advertising the wonders of Prof. Harris' Meteoric Balloon, which was surrounded by fireworks upon its evening ascents.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

into the water-filled Ohio Canal, some eight or nine feet deep. Tragically, his feet lodged in the mud at the canal bottom, causing him to drown.²⁴ Professor Atkins, a 20 year old from Toledo, Ohio, lost his life while with Mike Lipman's circus at Decatur, Alabama on May 27, 1872. As he was about to go aloft, he remarked apprehensively, "This is the last ascension I'll ever make." And it was. The balloon plummeted into the Tennessee River from a height of about a half-mile and the young man drowned.²⁵

Whereas the serious aeronauts of the past had been knowledgeable and precise about their use and preparation of balloons, circuses were far less careful. Instead of using a contemporary system of filling the balloon with hydrogen, they kept to the more primitive and less expensive means of hot air. The inflation process commenced at about a half-hour before send-off when hot air was created by the generation of heat from a temporary furnace built into the ground. When the moment came to ascend, the starter gave the signal and the aeronaut lifted off, usually clinging to a trapeze bar fastened to the balloon. Once aloft, the air voyager was followed on the ground by a man with horse and rig, so that after he alighted he could be swiftly returned to the show lot to relate his perilous journey to the assembled crowd and sell his photographs. With hydrogen, the buoyancy of the balloon could be controlled through careful release of the gas. With hot air, the speed of descent was proportionate to the time it took for the air within the balloon cavity to cool. If conditions were such that it cooled rapidly, the balloon could plummet to the ground at a dangerous pace. This would account for the repeated accidents.

This brings us to the ultimate question: why did circuses make use of balloon ascensions at this particular time? There is no single answer. A logical one was posed by Bob Parkinson in his 1961 *Bandwagon* article, "Circus Balloon Ascensions." He suggested that the sensational escape from Paris by Leon Gambetta while the city was under siege in October of 1870, during the Franco Prussian War, which was romanticized through newspaper accounts and illustrated weeklies, influenced circus proprietors to take



Printed by Strobridge Lithographing Co., this 1882 poster for W. C. Coup's New 9 Shows includes a whimsical illustration of the balloon surrounded by the promised daylight fireworks.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

advantage of the public interest over the event.²⁶ Still, that does not account for DeHaven's introduction of the balloon ascension, which occurred some months earlier. Certainly the Civil War balloonists contributed a share toward creating public interest, even though they saw limited use and were in operation for only a short period of time.

To me there is a more compelling reason. All of the circuses previously mentioned, the ones using the balloon ascension for a free act during 1870 and 1871, were either rail or boat shows or both. The years from 1850 to 1870 was a period during which there were increased attempts at rail

transportation by circuses, as added rail mileage made it easier to fill their dates. Still, these endeavors were not fully successful.

Fred Dahlinger, Jr., in his study of the early railroad circuses, developed some interesting ideas that apply here. He designated the turning point for the railroad circus as being in 1872 when P. T. Barnum's Museum, Menagerie, Caravan and Hippodrome successfully adopted rail travel through a system of loading and unloading the wagons from special flat cars and developing a more proficient means of railroad routing. Circuses prior to 1872 loaded onto box cars and generally hired local drays or used a form of "knockdown" wagon to carry the equipment from lot to rail siding, because the enclosed boxcars disallowed the transporting of regular baggage stock. In addition, the railroad system was still not fully developed to efficiently handle show movement. The upshot being, as Dahlinger described it: "The circus' inability to exploit rail travel coupled with the railroad system's lack of development caused showmen to downsize their shows to a level which could survive under these restrictive conditions. Virtually everything which was not necessary to house and execute the performance in the big top was eliminated, including the parade, the menagerie and the museum or sideshow. This self-imposed downsizing led to the popular conception that the rail show delivered less for the price of admission than the overland circus."²⁷

The balloon ascension at this early stage, then, was a substitute for the parade and menagerie with shows traveling by rail or boat in an attempt to compete with the innumerable wagon shows on the road following the war. As we have mentioned, DeHaven's circus moved principally by boat and rail. The others, the Empire City Circus of Wootten and Haight, Lake's Hippo-Olympiad and James Robinson's Champion Circus all traveled by rail at the time they first adopted the balloon ascension as a free act. According to the *Clipper*, the Empire City Circus "did not make any display," meaning no parade.²⁸

During May and June, G. G. Grady's circus traveled by steamer throughout Michigan, ending up at Chicago for the July 4th celebrations. From there they took to the rails for July and August. When Grady gave six exhibitions in Pittsburgh beginning July 31, 1871, a correspondent found the balloon ascension to be the greatest attraction with the company. "This is always a free exhibition and thousands of people witnessed it in Pittsburgh . . . Grady didn't take much 'stock' in street parades. His band, mounted on horseback, and a clown in ring costume, also on horseback, constituted the daily procession."²⁹ Of the James Robinson

Circus, the *Clipper* confirmed: "The company traveled by rail, so do not pretend to give a gorgeous street procession, but have an outside feature in the shape of a balloon ascension which is connected with the hot air plan."³⁰ The parade of the Hippo-Olympiad, traveling from the West by rail, was limited to a bandwagon circulating through the streets.³¹

Although the balloon ascension did not supplant the parade or the menagerie or side show, it appears to have been a useful substitute for the managers before the Barnum show opened the door to serious rail travel. And public fascination with circus balloon ascensions existed for another 50 years. The risk to human life was an aspect that made viewing more exciting, an occasional fatality to the aeronaut serving as an added feature to a spectacle that otherwise offered little in the way of variety. Still, the magic of being lifted into the air, defying the law of gravity, moving into what appears to be endless space, is a fulfillment of childhood fantasy. Today the aeronaut has been replaced by the astronaut. The public is still fascinated.

Who can say? Perhaps someday circuses will pitch their tents on Mars. **Bw**

Endnotes

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3. Kurt R. Stehling and William Beller, *Skyhooks* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1962), pp. 20-24.
4. Blanchard, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
6. Charles Durang (partly compiled from the papers of his father, John Durang; with notes by the editors), "The History of the Philadelphia Stage Between the Years 1749 and 1855," serialized in the *Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch*, 1854-1860, Part I, Chapter XXIII, pp. 44-45, microfilm.
7. *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, April 24, 1853; May 5, 1853.
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11. Col. Tom Picton (edited by William L. Slout), *Fun and Fancy in Old New York* (San Bernardino, CA: The Borgo Press, 1995).

12. *New York Clipper*, June 18, 1870, p. 87.
13. *New York Clipper*, August 6, 1870, p. 143; September 3, 1870, p. 175; October 22, 1870, p. 231.
14. *New York Clipper*, January 14, 1871, p.327.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
16. Josephine DeMott Robinson, *The Circus Lady*, pp.81-82.
17. *New York Clipper*, February 4, 1871, p.351.
18. *New York Clipper*, May 6, 1871, p. 39.
19. King, Orin C., "Only Big Show Coming," Part Two, *Bandwagon*, July-August, 1987, p. 42.
20. *New York Clipper*, July 22, 1871, p. 127.
21. *New York Clipper*, August 12, 1871, p. 151.
22. *New York Clipper*, July 29, 1871, p. 135.
23. Charles H. Day, "History of American Circus and Tented Exhibitions," *Billboard*, January 5, 1907, p. 20.
24. *New York Clipper*, August 5, 1871, p.143.
25. Even for skilled acrobats, balloon performing was dangerous and frequently deadly. Washington Harrison Donaldson (1840-1875) was the victim of one of the most famous balloon tragedies. A native Philadelphian and son of an alderman in that city, he was as a child fond of sports and eventually was proficient at balancing on a ladder, walking the tight-rope, etc. Subsequently, he became interested in aeronautics and performing on a trapeze suspended from a balloon. While in Philadelphia, Broad and Norris Streets, he ascended in a small one-man craft, which became unmanageable and descended near Atco, New Jersey. Three telegrams were sent to Philadelphia, stating that Donaldson had fallen from a great height and been killed, which created quite a sensation, all made plausible by the signature of "J. M. Spencer, M.D." Shortly, other telegrams announced that Donaldson was alive. It later came out that he had sent the telegrams himself and that losing the balloon was a pre-arranged publicity stunt. This came to the attention of P. T. Barnum, who, perhaps out of a feeling of kinship for a fellow "humbugger," hired the young aeronaut. Donaldson made his last and most famous flight for Barnum's circus in Chicago, when on July 15, 1875, he disappeared over Lake Michigan. After ascending in a tattered balloon used for the free act, he was carried out over the lake and wrecked. Both Donaldson and Greenwood (or Grimwood), a reporter for a Chicago newspaper, were assumed to have perished in the water. The following day, David S. Thomas, the show's press agent, assumed the role of aeronaut and made an

ascension himself. It later came out that as an amateur he had previously been involved in some 34 trips aloft. The newspaperman's body washed ashore some weeks later. The remains of Donaldson were never recovered.

There were others in the profession, however, on whom Fortune cast a more benevolent spell. Silas M. Brooks was one. He entered the entertainment business in 1848 when engaged by Barnum to form a Druid band. He manufactured crude horn instruments and grotesque costumes and created a successful act. Later, he organized a circus of his own, featuring a balloon ascension. When, his aeronaut, a man named Paulin, was taken ill, Brooks donned the aeronaut's garb and completed the scheduled flight. Finding the others to his liking, he continued in that capacity and accrued a fortune. Where it all went is unexplained, for he died in the poor house in Collinsville, Connecticut, on April 7, 1906.

August Buislay (1847-1911), the most prominent member of the Buislay Family, came to California from France and started a small, one-ring circus. As gymnasts and antipode artists, the group featured feats of the "Spiral Mountain" and the "Niagara Leap." When the first gas filled balloons came into vogue, August, an intrepid trapeze performer, began making ascensions and ultimately parachuting from the floating air bubble.

Prof. Samuel A. King (1828-1914) was another of the 19th century ascensionists who managed to stay alive in the profession. He was present at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876 and later traveled with Barnum & Bailey. When, during the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, he took a woman passenger aloft, the balloon was blown out over Lake Michigan and both were given up as lost. A revenue cutter was sent to find their remains, but before the boat returned the professor landed his craft safely on solid Chicago soil. He lived to die another day - in Philadelphia from heart failure at the age of 86.

26. Bob Parkinson, "Circus Balloon Ascensions," *Bandwagon*, March-April, 1961, p.4-5. 27.
27. Fred Dahlinger, Jr., "The Development of the Railroad Circus," Part One, *Bandwagon*, November-December, 1983, pp. 6-7.
28. *New York Clipper*, May 27, 1871, p. 62.
29. *New York Clipper*, August 12, 1871, p. 151.
30. *New York Clipper*, September 2, 1871, p. 175.
31. King, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

New Light on the Life of James A. Bailey

by A. H. Saxon

First published in Bandwagon November/December 1996, the following is the invitational paper delivered on the evening of the members' banquet at the 1996 CHS convention in Baraboo, Wisconsin. It was not planned as a scholarly, documented article, but rather as an informal, possibly even entertaining, talk on the subject, and is here published in the same form as it was presented. Copyright © 1996 by A. H. Saxon. All rights reserved.



This illustration of James A. Bailey, identified only as "Barnum's Partner" was clipped from an unidentified 1890 publication.

The Ringing Museum, Tibbals Collection

James Anthony Bailey – or shall we call him "McGinnis"? – perhaps even "Gordon"? – is certainly one of the more enigmatic figures in the history of the circus. Despite the fact that every book on the subject makes reference to him, and that rightly or wrongly, many people consider him to have been the greatest circus manager who ever lived, surprisingly little is known about his personal life. I am by no means convinced all that much is truly known even about his more public career as a manager. There have been so many exaggerated, unsubstantiated claims made in regard to that particular topic; but pace! I am not here to argue with or attempt to disabuse Bailey fans of any misconceptions they may have on that score, but merely to throw some light on the man himself.

Most people are familiar with at least one well-worn tale relating to Bailey's legendary shyness, his supposed distaste for the flamboyant kind of personal publicity his partner P. T. Barnum gloried in, his secretiveness about his origins that at times amounted almost to paranoia. Even in his own day he was deemed to be a mystery not only by his contemporaries but also, at various times, by members of his own immediate family. With the result that – unlike his extroverted partner Barnum, about whom some people might argue we have heard more than enough – there has never been a book-length, let alone a scholarly, exploration of his life. Instead, what we have is largely a collection of unrelated anecdotes drawn from the memoirs of old circus troupers and others who claim to have known or worked for Bailey. The one study to date that attempts to present a more or less comprehensive history of Bailey's professional career is a privately published pamphlet by the late circus historian Richard E. Conover, "The Affairs of James A Bailey: New Revelations on the Career of the World's Most Successful Showman." That study – and it's a good one, in my opinion – is now nearly 40 years old, runs to only 17 pages, and deals almost exclusively with Bailey's life in management.

Conover did, however, base his work on the great collection of circus and Wild West materials in the Princeton University library known as the "McCaddon Collection." He also claimed to have been the first to mine this collection, which came



The lot of Cooper & Bailey's Great International Allied Shows in 1876 prior to embarking on its Australian tour.

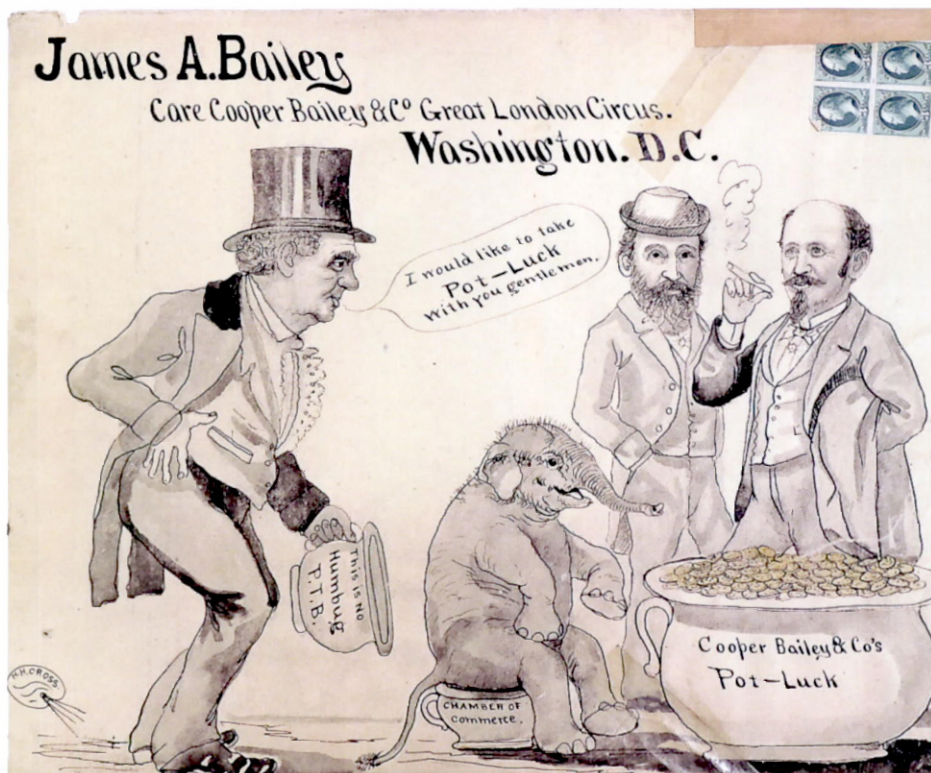
The Ringing Museum

to the university following the death of its owner, Joseph Terry McCaddon in 1938. McCaddon, who was the young brother of Bailey's wife Ruth, worked for his famous brother-in-law in a number of responsible positions, and at times owned and managed several entertainments of his own, including dime museums, touring theatrical companies, and a circus named after himself that he took to France early in the 20th century. His older son was a Princeton graduate, which explains how his collection ended up at that institution – and since McCaddon eventually came into possession of all Bailey's personal papers, and seems to have been pretty much a pack rat on his own, this is a very sizable and valuable collection indeed. One thing Conover did not find at Princeton, but which he mentions at the very end of his pamphlet, was a "biography" of Bailey that McCaddon was rumored to have been working on at the time of his death. "He should have finished it," Conover modestly writes, "as it would have been much better than this one."

Cut to July 1979 and New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, where the famous autograph dealer Charles Hamilton was conducting an auction. Some of you, I daresay, were present at that event, which included no less than 50 separate lots – often quite extensive in themselves – consisting of letters, photographs and other materials relating to Bailey, Barnum, Buffalo Bill, and to the American circus and Wild West show in general. I look at the catalogue for that auction today – with its descriptions of the items to be sold

and my supplementary notes on them and the prices they realized – and am almost driven to despair! Since I was then at work on my edition of Barnum's letters, I spent the better part of a day examining all these wonderful treasures in advance, and later assisted the Bridgeport Public Library in bidding on a number of lots possessing peculiar relevance to Barnum. We had the tremendous sum of a little over \$2,000.00 to spend – and with that were able to get nearly everything we wanted! At least one other institution that felt compelled to join in the bidding wasn't nearly so happy, however. All of these materials obviously came from the same source as had the McCaddon Collection at Princeton, and as one of the university's disappointed librarians remarked to me, "We thought we had been given all of it."

They hadn't, of course – and, recalling Conover's remark at the end of his pamphlet, this set me to thinking. Although Hamilton understandably wished to keep his source confidential, he did acknowledge to me that the seller was a McCaddon descendant. When I asked him if this descendant possessed any other items, like McCaddon's rumored "biography" of Bailey, he insisted there was nothing more to be had: he had "got it all." I urged him to keep the matter in mind anyway and to give the Bridgeport Public Library first crack at any additional materials that might be discovered. Lo and behold! in early 1986 additional materials did turn up in the basement of the descendant's house, and, true to his word, Hamilton did offer them directly to



This envelope was sent to Bailey by artist Henry Herman Cross in 1880 as the showman was negotiating with Barnum following the birth of the baby elephant, Columbia. Graphic Arts Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University

the Bridgeport Public Library. And among those materials, running to some 600 pages and preserved in three loose-leaf binders, was McCaddon's long-lost manuscript "biography" of Bailey.

Although you would never know it from my delivery, I have been putting this word "biography" – Conover's own term for it – in quotation marks, since I think it would be more accurate to describe the work as a "memoir." The focus of the narrative is indeed on Bailey, and the period covered roughly coincides with Bailey's dates (which McCaddon always gives as 1847 to 1906, incidentally, the same as are also incised on Bailey's sepulchre). But the viewpoint is pretty much McCaddon's, and the work is primarily an account of his direct, personal knowledge of Bailey and his shows. The manuscript, therefore, is by no means a comprehensive or complete treatment of Bailey's life. Also worth pointing out is the fact that McCaddon, who had a number of scores to settle and who was quite defensive about his brother-in-law, whom he literally worshipped and at one point terms "the most wonderful man in the world," cannot always be relied on for accuracy and especially an impeccably objective interpretation of events. Then, too, the manuscript itself, which can hardly be termed an example of literary

excellence, is in an unfinished, at times disorganized state. The result of all this is that anyone making use of McCaddon's memoir, in addition to exercising considerable caution and – one would hope bringing expert judgment to bear, must be prepared to supplement and at times correct it with information drawn from a broad array of other sources.

So much for methodology and the history of the manuscript. Now let me tell you something about Bailey's background and personal life – information that, in many instances, McCaddon claims to have gotten directly from Bailey and that could not very well have come from any other source. His real family name, as most historians are aware by now, was McGinnis – a name so repugnant to him that from early youth on he never used it. Instead, when he was first starting out on his own and people would ask him his name, he would simply reply, "My only name is Jimmy – I haven't any other name." That was before he assumed

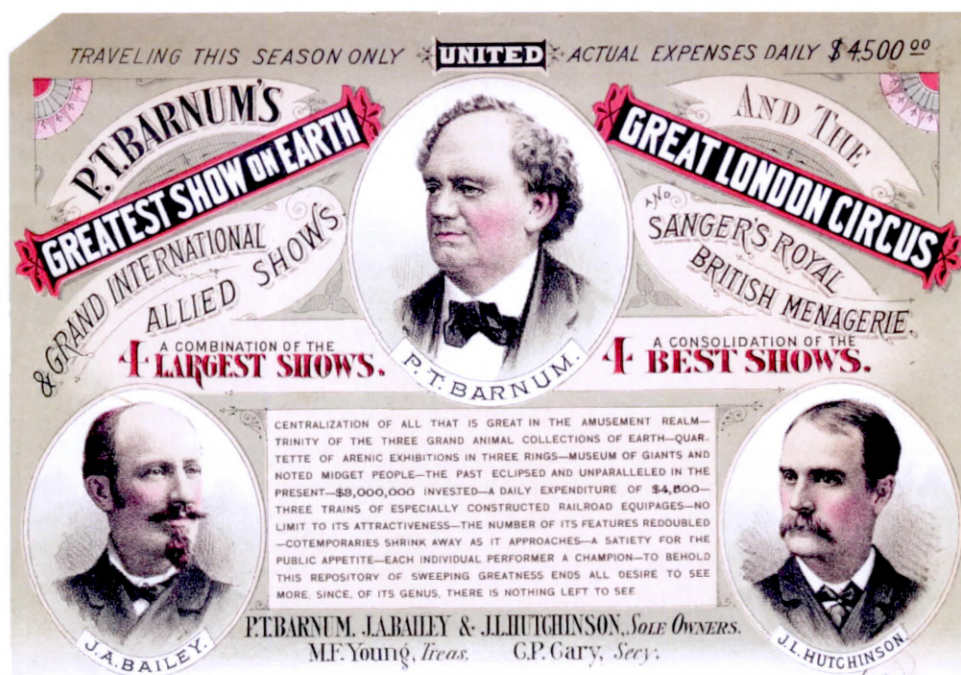
the family name of Col. Fred Bailey, the advance agent for Robinson and Lake's Circus, who took young "Jimmy" on as an apprentice when he was around 13 years old. McCaddon even reports that the kindly Fred Bailey "adopted" Jimmy and became his "foster father" – but surely this must have been an informal arrangement, much the same as in the pere d'eleve tradition found in the European circus, whereby a master, without going to any legal trouble, will confer his name on an especially promising pupil and take him or her into his family. Rather interestingly, McCaddon himself, upon going to work for his brother-in-law in 1876 when he was 16 years old, became a part of this same tradition and for several years went by the name of "Joe M. Bailey." I say the "adoption" must have been an informal one, because when Bailey later married McCaddon's sister Ruth in 1868, it was not under the name of "Bailey" or even "McGinnis," but under an entirely different surname: "Gordon." Incredible as it may seem, McCaddon claims that for the first 15 years following her wedding – that is, until as late as 1883 – his sister had no reason to suspect she was married to anyone other than "James A. Gordon"! And when the truth finally did come out, it was only through "accident."

Obviously, this is a fairly complicated subject, and I can only summarize it in the time available to me. It is further complicated by McCaddon's own financial involvement in it, for upon Bailey's death in 1906, his entire estate, estimated to be worth between 5 and 8 million dollars, went to his wife; and when she in turn died six years later, the estate passed exclusively to her side of the family, with McCaddon himself receiving around a third of it. Now the McGinnises were a fairly numerous and contentious tribe; and, rightly or wrongly, they thought they were entitled to a portion of this fortune. Consequently, there were several law suits over the estate following both Bailey's and his wife's deaths. I have looked into some of the documents relating to these actions, and they make for intriguing, occasionally disturbing reading. Talk about dysfunctional families! This one, by its own admission, suffered from hereditary insanity, which Bailey himself was said to have exhibited from the mid-1880s until the end of his life. One of his loving relatives even went so far as to assert he was a drug addict and so often out of his mind that, when traveling with the circus, his private railway car contained a padded cell for his use! Picture that scene in your imaginations, if you can: a sort of Bedlam-on-Wheels, with a crazy James A. Bailey staring out a barred window, barking orders at his men, and no doubt shouting obscenities at passing elephants. That would have been a "first" in circus or any kind of history, I think. There were other family afflictions as well. Two of Bailey's brothers appear to have done time in jail; one of his sisters – and I almost blush at having to report this – was so devoid of morals that she ran off with a "Frenchman"!

The plaintiffs in these actions – who for the most part were Bailey's nieces and nephews, since all of his brothers and sisters predeceased him (dying insane, naturally) – charged that both McCaddon and his sister had exerted undue influence over Bailey and had prevented them from visiting their dear uncle, even though he was extremely fond of them and had promised to buy them houses and a great many other nice things. The defense countered that Bailey's mind was as "clear as a bell" and that, far from feeling any fondness for his blood relatives,

Bailey "hated" the lot of them – the single exception being his older brother Edward or "Ned," the only member of the family who ever exhibited any kindness toward him – didn't want to see them, and certainly never intended to help them in any way. True or false? The former, I suspect, in view of Bailey's actions while he was alive. "Anyone not knowing the man and the reticence of his nature," McCaddon writes, referring to Bailey's secrecy in regard to his real name, "might assume there was something in his early life of which he was ashamed. There was, but not caused by any act of his."

According to what he supposedly told McCaddon about this early life, Jimmy was the youngest of seven children, born in Detroit in 1847 and orphaned at the time of his mother's death when he was eight years old. Apparently the family was by no means poor, for the mother left around \$20,000.00 to the children; and the husband of Jimmy's eldest sister Catharine, a Detroit alderman and politician named "Gordon," was appointed his guardian and took him in. There followed a period of blighted childhood that reads like something out of a novel by Dickens. "Instead of being treated as a ward for whom considerable provisions were made," McCaddon quotes Bailey as bitterly remarking, "I was made to work like a dog, and on the least provocation was whipped. My sister had boys of about my own age, and for their misdeeds I was punished. ... I was worked so hard that I was always late at school, so I was



Letterhead created for the 1881 merger of the Barnum & London shows.

The Ringing Museum, Tibbals Collection



By 1889, the show was known as the Barnum & Bailey New United Shows, and proudly proclaimed itself to be "Honorably Conducted" and "Honestly Presented."

The Ringing Museum, Tibbals Collection

continually being punished after school; and then for being late in getting home I was whipped again. I stood that treatment until I was about 11 years old." The only member of his family who ever stood up for little Jimmy, it seems, was his older brother "Ned."

But why then, you may ask, would Bailey ever wish to make use of the name of "Gordon" in preference to that of "McGinnis"? With all due respect to those who are forever harping on the subject of the male as abuser, I have to report it was not Mr. Gordon who did all this whipping, but Bailey's sister Catharine. And that, it seems to me, helps explain his decision during his early years, especially when he was in need of something for legal purposes like a marriage certificate and wasn't yet entirely comfortable with his mentor's surname, to make use of the one name while disowning the other. It was his own blood relatives – his sister in particular – he couldn't stand; and he wanted nothing, not even the family name he was born with, to remind him of his early life with them.

Except for his older brother Edward, of course. And here we finally near the end of this particular story. One day little Jimmy and some friends were swimming in the

Detroit River – an activity that was forbidden by law on account of the dangerous currents – when they saw some policemen approaching. Jimmy ran off, leaving some of his clothes on the bank; and knowing he was sure to receive another severe thrashing upon returning home, decided then and there to run away. And he never went back. What he didn't know at the time, however, was that his companions had not seen him leave the water. Consequently, those clothes left behind on the river bank were taken as evidence that he had drowned and his body had been carried away!

Years later – nearly a quarter of a century later, in fact – Bailey finally wrote a letter to his favorite brother "Ned" asking him to visit him while the circus was in Detroit. McCaddon, who was then going by the name of "Joe

M. Bailey," happened to be on the lot when Ned showed up; and when Ned asked one of the employees where he could find "Mr. Bailey," he was mistakenly directed to McCaddon. "Are you Mr. Bailey's son?" the visitor tentatively inquired. "No," McCaddon replied, "brother-in-law." "My name is Edward McGinnis," the visitor continued. "Mr. Bailey wrote me he is my brother and asked me to come here."

That was the first time McCaddon or any member of his family, including Bailey's wife, had ever heard the name "McGinnis," and then only because of the employee's mistake in directing Ned to McCaddon. It's hard to say who was more surprised by all this: McCaddon and his sister at the discovery of Bailey's true name, or brother Ned upon learning that little Jimmy, so many years after he was believed to have drowned, was really alive and going by an assumed name. The tortuous situation is reminiscent of the anagnorisis or "recognition" scene in classical Greek drama. And the restraint exhibited by the principal characters strikes me as almost "classical" as well. McCaddon writes that he took Ned to Bailey and introduced him by saying, "This gentleman says his name is Edward McGinnis

and [he] wishes to see you." Then he simply adds, "They shook hands and I walked away."

McCaddon, as I've already mentioned, idolized his brother-in-law. By the time he got around to writing his memoir, he had even more reason to do so, since by then he had come into his share of Bailey's considerable estate. He is almost never critical of Bailey, no matter how hardnosed and insensitive some decision of the latter may be; and what is perhaps the most egregious, not to say revealing, example of this occurred at the end of 1878 when the circus owned by Bailey and his early partner James E. Cooper, after making a tidy fortune touring the American West, Australia and New Zealand, proceeded to lose most of it in South America while on its return to the U.S. The problem seems to have been one of "currency exchange," not the quality of the show or Bailey's management of it; but the result was that Bailey found he could not cover expenses and would have to cut the tour short. Now we have all heard of theatrical and other managers running out on their employees when payday was about to roll around, and circuses themselves have been guilty from time to time of that delightful practice known as "red lighting." But somehow it seems to me that the stunt Bailey now pulled really takes the proverbial "cake."

Here I should add that this particular tour was McCaddon's own introduction to show business, and that during the first three years of his apprenticeship he received no salary at all – simply his board and clothes. After getting the company as far as Buenos Aires, Bailey announced that since transporting the animals to New York would be an expensive business, "all performers and others would have to pay their own fare home." And this, mind you, also went

for his teenage brother-in-law and all the other unsalaried apprentices, including a young nephew and namesake of Cooper! Those who had no money saved for such emergencies were simply left to get back as best they could.

If anyone was outraged at this announcement, McCaddon never lets on. Here is what he has to say about it – only keep in mind he was writing this at least half a century later – so that we can only speculate about what he must have really felt at the time. "I have always thought Mr. Bailey was trying us out to see if we would work our way home as dining-room stewards or [at] other work, as performed by several performers who had squandered their money. I was quite sure at the last minute he would pay our fare, and I have always thought he was pleased to find we [meaning McCaddon and young Cooper] could take care of ourselves." And so they did, fortunately for them.

On a number of subsequent occasions Bailey again let his brother-in-law down hard, and at one point, after an argument over money (what else?), the two parted company for several years. But again, in retrospect, McCaddon seems always willing to give Bailey the benefit of the doubt; and he was also, as self-appointed guardian of his brother-in-law's reputation, capable of becoming fiercely protective whenever anyone dared attack him. (The same applied to his sister, incidentally, for whom he once did battle with a journalist who had described her as a social climber.)

Around the turn of the century Bailey got up a stock company for his show properties that was incorporated in England. My own reading of the evidence is that this great business opportunity was not altogether what it was represented to be; and following Bailey's death, even that



A cabinet card photograph featured James A. Bailey and his staff for the 1892 circus season.

The Ringing Museum, Tibbals Collection



Bailey stands in the door at the right in this image of the New York office of Barnum & Bailey, circa 1905.

The Ringing Museum, Tibbals Collection

old stalwart "Tody" Hamilton wrote a highly critical article about it. It was all a scheme, he claimed, to take in unsuspecting English investors with an inventory whose advertised value was inflated to 20 times its actual worth. Bailey himself profited hugely from the sale of the company's watered stock, he continues; there is an English sucker also "born every 60 solar seconds." McCaddon, who retained a copy of the article for his files, has annotated it with the sarcastic comment "Exemplification of Gratitude" and goes on to explain in a typewritten note that Hamilton wrote the article to get even with Bailey's widow, who had refused to redeem for him, at par value, the 2,000 shares of stock Bailey had given Hamilton as a gift. True or false? This time I'm not altogether certain. But it was this same speculation that led to the breakup between Bailey and McCaddon, after the latter complained about never receiving any dividends for all the shares of stock he possessed.

Although I intend to keep the emphasis of this talk on Bailey's private life, I can't resist summarizing for you what McCaddon has to say about Bailey's peculiar qualities as

a manager – all the more so since, of all the explanations I've read of Bailey's success in this area, McCaddon's strikes me as being the best and most plausible. The great advantage Bailey possessed over other circus owners, McCaddon writes, was that he began his career not with the show itself, but rather in the "advance," that all important department charged not only with advertising the coming of the circus on billboards and sides of buildings, in shop windows, in local newspapers, etc., but also with planning the show's route from town to town, obtaining necessary licenses and permits while winning over local officials, contracting for show grounds and provisions for all the employees and animals, and taking care of everything else necessary to ensure the show's favorable reception and smooth operation once it arrived. This was the department that Fred Bailey, Bailey's mentor and early employer, headed in Robinson and Lake's Circus; and where young Jimmy quickly became so proficient that, when he was barely into his teens, he was able to take over and discharge all these duties on his own whenever the colonel was absent.

"In the beginning of his career," McCaddon writes, "he had driven over the roads of all the midwest and southern states, year after year, in the horse and buggy days, in advance of the old-fashioned wagon shows ... and he would familiarize himself with junctional points, distances, [and] the chief industries or products" of a region. Bailey possessed a "marvelous memory" for such details; and in later life, even when the circus was traveling abroad, he would quickly master the topography, transportation facilities, and all the other significant features of any country the show happened to be in. Other circus owners like Adam Forepaugh never had the advantage of such an education. Consequently, they were at the mercy of their advance personnel; and whenever these proved lazy or incompetent, trouble, sometimes even financial ruin, was the inevitable result.

Not so with Bailey, however. He thoroughly knew the "advance" thanks to his early experience with it. Whenever anything went wrong in that department – as during the 1883 season when his top men there were hired away by another circus (Forepaugh's) with the promise of having their salaries doubled – he was prepared to wade in and take charge himself. Once he became an owner and began traveling with the show, he rapidly mastered the intricacies of all the other departments as well, thereby becoming – with the sole exception of performing in the ring, of course – a "complete" circus man.

Perhaps he was a little too "complete." Time and again one reads of his being unwilling or perhaps constitutionally unable to delegate authority. True, he would often solicit opinions on some matter from his subordinates. But after hearing them out, it was his ideas that usually prevailed – and woe to anyone who failed to go along with them! The threat of "instant dismissal" is a recurring theme in pronouncements and directions emanating from the front office. When McCaddon himself, after the circus returned to the states from South America at the end of 1878, transferred to the "advance" of the Cooper and Bailey show, his brother-in-law, referring to the experienced manager under whom he would be working, instructed him to "learn to obey orders. If he directs you to post a bill upside down, be sure you understand correctly and don't argue about it. Do as you are directed."

Elsewhere McCaddon writes that Bailey was in daily telegraph contact with the "advance," and that personnel in every department were expected to carry out his instructions precisely and were never permitted to initiate any important actions on their own. Even in the matter of ad-

vertising he was indefatigable. Artists from the Strobridge and Courier companies, who traveled to the show's headquarters each winter and spent weeks working from ideas he supplied for posters, would submit sketch after sketch to him until he expressed himself satisfied. When it came to small bills and newspaper advertisements, too, McCaddon claims, "he was extremely particular that his ideas and his alone should be clearly expressed."

The picture that emerges from all this is one of Bailey endlessly "micromanaging" everything. I have run across descriptions of him taking an avid interest in the most trivial things, down to the purchase of a single pot of paint. One journalist who succeeded in interviewing him writes that, after putting in a 12 hour day, Bailey would go home to continue thinking about the circus and then to dream about it. Another writer describes him as becoming upset whenever anyone was caught sneaking into the show, and as actually sitting outside the tent to watch for anyone trying to do so! He was obsessed with every detail of the circus. McCaddon himself at one point describes him as being "a great and active detail man" – and while no doubt this helps explain his great success as a manager, one might also expect it to have taken a toll on his nerves and constitution. Perhaps, too, as I rather suspect, it was Bailey's peculiar psychological makeup – the traumatic events of his childhood, especially, when he discovered he could not count on even his closest relatives for affection or support – that caused him to find it so difficult to rely others in later life.

Somehow, for all the sympathy one feels for him on account of his wretched childhood, I can't bring myself to like James A. Bailey very much. My own impression, after reading McCaddon's memoir and all the other sources to which I've had access over the years, is that he was a rather heartless, cheerless individual. Yes, he was said to be devoted to his wife (and McCaddon, for self-evident reasons, labors to pump up that legend as well); and we do have that picture of the long lost "Jimmy," presumably struggling manfully to keep his emotions in check, silently shaking hands with his brother "Ned." But then there is also that "hatred" he allegedly felt for all his other blood relatives; there were no children or grandchildren for him to be photographed with while bouncing them on his knee; and in fact I've seen nothing to convince me that Bailey genuinely cared for children, or people in general, the way his convivial partner P. T. Barnum did. Can anyone recall his ever playing a practical joke? Can anyone – perhaps more revealingly – recall his ever being the butt of such a joke? Even the easy-going Barnum, McCaddon writes, never dared refer to his young

partner as other than "Mister Bailey." It was only within the confines of his home that his wife and brother-in-law felt free to call him "Jimmy."

From a psychological viewpoint, however, Bailey does present a far more challenging picture than most of his contemporaries I can think of. In addition to his almost pathological shyness, he appears to have been a perpetually nervous, high-strung individual. Again, perhaps his unhappy childhood – all those beatings at the hand of his sister – was in part responsible for this. Perhaps, too, there really was something to his relatives' claim that he suffered from some "hereditary" defect in his mental makeup. McCaddon, seeking to refute the charge that he and his sister had exerted undue influence on Bailey, naturally enough denied this in court; yet his own memoir reveals Bailey was frequently ill and unable to work from 1885 onward. That was the year, as related in my biography of Barnum, that he suffered a severe "nervous breakdown" and had to retire from circus management for a good two years. In the attempt to convince his readers there must have been some external cause for this collapse, McCaddon blames the whole thing on Barnum, whose "constant nagging and fault-finding," whose "fussiness, continuous suggestions, and interference" in the running of the show, finally drove Bailey over the edge. He even charges Barnum with having done the same thing to his earlier circus partner W. C. Coup! True or false? This time I believe McCaddon, who rarely had a good word to say about P. T. Barnum, deliberately distorts the picture.

Neither Bailey nor Coup, to my knowledge, ever made such an accusation themselves; and the latter, in fact, upon Barnum's death in 1891, wrote for publication in the *New York Clipper* a revealing account of their partnership, men-



Bailey's brother-in-law, Joseph T. McCaddon, as he appeared in the 1901 route book *Four Years in Europe: The Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth in the Old World*.

The Ringing Museum, Tibbals Collection

tioning, among other things, that it "was in every way a pleasant and successful one." If Barnum really did have such a devastating effect on Bailey, one can't help wondering why Bailey, after recovering from his breakdown, returned in the fall of 1887 to become Barnum's partner again and willingly continued as such until the elder showman's death four years later. Barnum was indeed in the habit of bombarding Bailey and just about everyone else he knew with "suggestions" and advice – but as his extant letters to Bailey prove, far from "constantly nagging" or otherwise "interfering"

in the running of the show, he rarely insisted on having his own way and was invariably respectful, even deferential, toward his younger partner. He genuinely liked and admired Bailey, and I find it difficult to believe these feelings were not reciprocated to at least some degree.

To return to McCaddon's memoir, however, there is plenty of evidence for Bailey's less than perfect health following his nervous breakdown in 1885. In May of 1887, for example, while vacationing in New Jersey, Bailey suffered another "serious collapse" that lasted several weeks and for a time actually rendered him "unconscious." Precisely what the matter was McCaddon doesn't specify (Barnum was nowhere in sight!); but from other documents I have seen I believe it may have been a stroke. Bailey himself, in connection with an early court battle with his "hated" relatives, is quoted as acknowledging he was "very sick in my head" in the early part of 1886 [sic] and as also suffering at that time an attack of "paralysis." As late as the season of 1903, after Barnum had been safely dead for 12 years, he is described by McCaddon as being on the verge of another "nervous breakdown," this time brought on by some "labor troubles" the circus was then experiencing. For several

years toward the end of Bailey's life, too, McCaddon boasts that he possessed an unrestricted power-of-attorney over not only Bailey's business but also his personal affairs. That in itself, to my way of thinking, tells something about the precarious state of Bailey's health and the fears over what might happen should he suddenly become incapacitated or die. He was by no means a robust individual, either physically or emotionally.

Which brings me to the matter of his death and my sincere hope that by now you have all sufficiently digested your dinners! Probably you have read or heard that old wives' tale about Bailey being bitten by a mosquito inside Madison Square Garden and his subsequently being carried off by erysipelas. The last is a kind of streptococcal infection, easily cured today with antibiotics. But they weren't available in Bailey's day, of course; and Bailey, who did indeed come down with an acute form of this illness, died at his home in Mt. Vernon, New York, some five days after contracting it. A number of the doctors and specialists who attended him believed he might have picked up the germ in Madison Square Garden, carried there in some cart loads of dirt that had been brought in to prepare the arena for the annual opening of the circus. But the actual mechanism of transmission was not any mosquito, but Bailey himself, after he had stomped around in and became contaminated with this dirt. For some years, McCaddon writes, Bailey had been in the habit of plucking out with his bare fingers the hairs that grew in his nostrils, and occasionally this would lead to an infection, causing a slight sore to form. This time the infection, which began in his nose before spreading to both sides of his head and right elbow, proved deadly. McCaddon claims to have been present when his brother-in-law died. "And thus passed to his long, last rest a great and indomitable spirit," he writes rather conventionally.

Almost immediately McCaddon's sister gave him the power to act for her in all matters relating to Bailey's show



A portrait of James A. Bailey, circa 1903.

The Ringing Museum, Tibbals Collection

properties. He quickly sold off to the Ringling brothers Bailey's half-interest in the Adam Forepaugh-Sells Bros. Combined Shows (at an earlier date the Ringlings had acquired their initial half-interest in this) then began negotiations, he writes, to form a holding company with the brothers that would have included their own circus and the Forepaugh-Sells Shows; and, as the contribution from the Bailey estate, the Barnum & Bailey Show and Bailey's interest in Buffalo Bill's Wild West. But it was "sometimes difficult to get the five brothers to agree upon an important matter," he complains, and this idea fell through. The Ringlings then made an offer to buy all the assets of the Barnum & Bailey circus – and the rest, as the saying goes, is "history."

McCaddon's memoir ends around this point, even though he did continue to manage and represent the estate's interest in the Buffalo Bill show for some years to come. But again, it was never his main objective to chronicle his own career in the entertainment world (although from time to time he does supply some fascinating insights into that area), but rather that of his celebrated brother-in-law. That the picture he paints of Bailey is not always as deep or complete as we might wish it to be is hardly McCaddon's fault, in my opinion. Bailey is not, even for a professional biographer, an easy subject; and as a number of the stories I've been telling you make abundantly clear, sometimes even his closest family members had difficulty penetrating the secrecy with which he so often cloaked his private affairs. Whether he truly was, as Conover claimed, the "world's most successful showman" (and I obviously have some opinions of my own on that topic!) I am content to let others decide. There can be little doubt, however, that Bailey does represent one of the world's most elusive showmen; and hence any document that throws new light on his life and character is bound to merit our attention. For all its self interest and other faults, McCaddon's long-lost memoir certainly does that. **BW**

The Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth



SECTION 1 - SHOWING THE GREAT 40 HORSE TEAM AND PONDEROUS TABLEAU BAND WAGON OF THE TWO HEMISPHERES. THIS ONE VEHICLE AND TEAM REPRESENTING AN OUTLAY OF OVER \$50,000.

THE WORLD'S LARGEST, GRANDEST, BEST, AMUSEMENT INSTITUTION.

The Two Hemispheres Bandwagon was commissioned for Barnum & Bailey's return to the United States in 1903. This Strobridge Lithographing Co. poster was printed to advertise the new parade feature. The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

James A. Bailey's Last Parades 1903 & 1904

by Greg Parkinson

First published in Bandwagon May/June 1982, a version of this paper was presented at the 1982 Circus Historical Society convention.

Throughout the era of the colossal circus street parades, the Barnum Circus¹ always presented one of the most spectacular horse-drawn processions to be viewed along the sidewalks, boardwalks and curbs of America's cities and towns. The street marches produced in 1903 and 1904 by James A. Bailey were no exception. These parades were designed with several new units to exploit the success of the second tour (1897-1902) of *The Greatest Show On Earth* to

Britain and the continent of Europe. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the new parade was intended to be the centerpiece of Bailey's scheme to reconquer popularity, as the Ringlings had successfully moved into traditional Barnum & Bailey territory during the interim.

On March 18, 1903 Barnum & Bailey Circus opened in Madison Square Garden and began its first engagement on American soil in over five years. A special new set of parade posters designed by Strobridge Litho Co. demonstrated the management's intent that the "Half Million Dollar Grand Street Pageant" was to play a considerable role in telling the public that "The World's Largest, Grandest, Best Amusement Institution" was back. These lithographs and the 1903 *Realm* (courier) both illustrated the new wagons which

were constructed by the Sebastian Works in New York City. Included were the Two Hemispheres Bandwagon, the four continental telescoping tableau wagons: America, Asia, Africa and Europe; Our Country; Funny Folks; Fairy Tales; and the Golden Age of Chivalry. The color schemes of all nine of these parade wagons are recorded in the *Realm*.

Four other vehicles which were built primarily in association with "The Tribute of Balkis" spec were on the parade inventory of 1903. These four floats replaced similar ones used in the "King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba" spectacle which was introduced in Paris late in 1901 and subsequently used throughout the 1902 tour of France.² These were the Triumphal Car of Balkis, the Phoenician Galley, the Throne Tableau Car (often called Egypt; sometimes called the Queen's Float) and the Imperial Chariot (variously called the King of Babylon Float or the King's Float).³ The earliest *Billboard* mention of the parade confirms the dual role that these four wagons played in the spec and the street parade.⁴

The order for 13 new wagons from Sebastian touched off a boom in parade wagon construction. The Ringlings responded by ordering six new parade wagons from Bode Wagon Co. of Cincinnati, Ohio. These included the United States Bandwagon, Great Britain, Russia, Germany, the Snake Den and the cumbersome Pipe Organ wagon. An even bigger order was placed with the Milwaukee Ornamental Carving Co., which included five nation floats – Persia, India, Egypt, Spain and France – a hippo den, a rhino den and the Paradise tableau wagon.⁵

The fact that these new Barnum & Bailey wagons, for the most part, could carry no baggage has been a target of criticism for showpeople and historians alike. Just exactly who designed each of the wagons is not known, although the longtime Strobridge artist, Harry Ogden, was responsible for at least the design of the Two Hemispheres Bandwagon.⁶ Its elaborate carvings were constructed in the Spanjer Bros. Newark, New Jersey shops.

The continental tableau wagons displayed $\frac{2}{3}$ size wooden copies of the four corner statues which sur-

round the Prince Albert Memorial in Hyde Park, London. Each is themed to characterize the geography it portrays as well as the vastness of the British Empire at the time that Prince Albert was the consort of Queen Victoria. Plausible speculation suggests that the seeds for the idea to duplicate the statues on circus wagons were planted during one of the show's engagements in London or on one of Bailey's or George Starr's many trips to the British capital. In any event, Samuel A. Robb is credited with supervising the work on these gems of circus woodcarving.

One of the earliest significant events of the season took place on May 11, 1903 when the canvasmen and working men, who had formed a union just before the inauguration of the season, went on strike in Washington, D.C.⁷ As a result, Barnum & Bailey was late arriving in several of the early season towns, and the parade was seldom presented at the time advertised. The reported cause of the strike was the show's failure to meet a demand for an increase of \$5.00 per month in wages. However, other sources suggested that the squabble was due, not to the difference in wages, but rather to the weight of the show.⁸ Apparently it was the poundage of the seats that caused the most dissatisfaction among the workers. Bailey had had all of the seating built new and the reserved seats were made of iron, styled after French opera chairs which he had observed the year before.⁹

In addition to the labor troubles and difficulties in erecting and tearing down the show, the "poor service" of the railroads causing late arrivals, was given part of the blame for lost performances and lost parades.¹⁰

The problems resulting from the extreme weight of the



A Glasier photograph of the Phoenician Galley Float taken in 1903.

The Ringling Museum, Frederick W. Glasier Collection

The following is the parade order developed by an analysis of the 46 units appearing in the 1904 film by the Whalen Mechanical Opera Company:

- (1) Two Hemispheres Bandwagon drawn by 40 horse team
- (2) Open Cage #70 drawn by 4 horse team
- (3) Open Cage #71 drawn by 4 horse team
- (4) Open Cage #72 drawn by 4 horse team
- (5) Open Cage #73 drawn by 4 horse team
- (6) Open Cage #74 drawn by 4 horse team
- (7) L. B. Lent Bandchariot drawn by 8 horse team (built circa 1870; acquired by Barnum show circa 1877)
- (8) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team*
- (9) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team
- (10) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team
- (11) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team
- (12) Orchestmelchor drawn by 6 horse team (originated in 1868)*
- (13) Four mounted Ladies of the Hippodrome
- (14) Six mounted Gentlemen Jockeys
- (15) Two Roman Chariots drawn by 2 horses each
- (16) Two Roman Chariots drawn by 4 horses each
- (17) Marching Fife & Drum Corps (13 members)
- (18) Our Country President's Float drawn by 6 horse team and American soldier outriders
- (19) Golden Age of Chivalry drawn by 6 horse team and medieval knight outriders
- (20) Funny Folks Tableau drawn by 6 horse team and jester outriders
A remote possibility for missing units exists in this location due to camera editing.
- (21) Fairy Tales Tableau drawn by 6 horse team and herald outriders
- (22) Tableau #51 drawn by 4 horse team (built circa 1882)
- (23) Tableau #50 drawn by 4 horse team (built circa 1882) with piper band
- (24) 16 camels
- (25) 20 elephants including two with howdahs
- (26) Blue Beard Float drawn by 8 ponies (built circa 1886)
- (27) Howes Great London Dragon Float drawn by 8 ponies (built in 1871; entered the Barnum & London parade stock via the 1880 combination with Cooper, Bailey & Co.)*

- (28) Chimes or Calliope Wagon drawn by 4 horse team (probably built circa 1876) with canvas over openings
- (29) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team
- (30) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team
- (31) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team
- (32) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team
- (33) Five Graces Bandwagon drawn by 8 horse team (built in 1878; became part of the Barnum & Bailey parade stock following their purchase of the Adam Forepaugh Circus in 1890)
- (34) Tableau #93 drawn by 4 horse team
- (35) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team
- (36) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team
- (37) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team (referred to as the Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson Cage #61 at CWM today)
- (38) Closed Cage drawn by 4 horse team
- (39) America Tableau drawn by 6 horse team and U.S. soldier outriders
- (40) Forepaugh Lion Bandchariot drawn by 6 horse team (built circa 1868; replaced the Van Amburgh 1868 Lion Bandchariot in 1903)
- (41) Tableau or musical wagon drawn by 6 horse team
- (42) Two Roman Chariots drawn by 2 horses each
- (43) King of Babylon Float drawn by 6 horses, without wings and candelabra
- (44) Triumphal Car of Balkis drawn by 6 horse team
- (45) Egypt Tableau drawn by 6 horse team
A possibility exists for units in this location, which are not visible.
- (46) Batcheller & Doris Steam Calliope (built early 1880s; on Barnum & Bailey 1888-1904)* with only the smoke visible.

***For more historical background about these wagons see:**

- Richard E. Conover, *The Fielding Bandchariots*, (Xenia, Ohio: By the Author, 1969), pp.52-56.
- Fred D. Pfening, III, "The Orchestmelchor Wagon and Its Origins," *Bandwagon*, Nov./Dec. 1972, pp. 22-24.
- Fred Pfening III, "Some Interesting Lithos from the P. M. McClintock Collection," *Bandwagon*, Mar./Apr. 1965, p. 14.
- Fred D. Pfening, Jr. and Richard E. Conover, "Pictorial Encyclopedia of Circus Parade Wagons," *Bandwagon*, Nov./Dec. 1969, p. 16.

seats and bulk of the show were never completely solved. However, the show reportedly began the season with 92 sixty foot railroad cars and later cut back to 82 of the sixty foot cars.¹¹ By mid-June things were running more smoothly.

The 1904 parade was nearly identical to the parade of 1903. Carl Clair's band rode on the Two Hemispheres. William Emery was the Superintendent of the elephant herd. The Drum Corps, listed in the route book as containing 16 members, doubled as "ushers" in the performance tent. No new parade wagons were known to have been built.

The season's first street march was made on the day that the circus opened under canvas in Brooklyn, April 25, 1904. During the month of May, parades were cancelled in Jersey City, Newark and New Brunswick (New Jersey); Pittsburgh; East Liverpool, Akron and Mansfield (Ohio); and Detroit. The reasons ranged from threatening weather to dates missed. On May 7, in Wilmington, Delaware, the "big bandwagon" and one of the tableau wagons were "wrecked" in the parade.¹² The seriousness of this incident can only be guessed at. The only major reported threat to

public safety during the parade occurred in Ann Arbor, Michigan on June 16, when college students threw firecrackers at the elephants during the parade and caused a stampede. Although 15 minutes were required to corral all of the animals, no one was injured.¹³

Four dates in a row in early July, listed in the route book, give the reader the impression that any hint of showers caused the management to cancel the street parade. The horse drawn procession was not a rain or shine event.

The last significant entry in the 1903-1904 route book relative to the street parade is found under the heading for Waterloo, Iowa, August 27, 1904. The statement simply reads, "The Whalen Mechanical Opera Company photographed the parade for use in moving picture machine."

In 1981, Fred D. Pfening, Jr. presented the Circus World Museum with the remarkable Barnum & Bailey parade movie which had been kept under wraps by P. M. McClintock of Franklin, Pennsylvania (and before that, Detroit) for nearly 50 years. Fred Pfening's generosity made available the film that was taken in 1904 by the Whalen Mechanical Opera Company in Waterloo.

The Barnum & Bailey "superb and surprising new triumphal street parade" was billed in Waterloo to begin at 10:00 A.M.¹⁴ The route book reported clear and pleasant weather on that Saturday, and capacity business was recorded by both the route book and local newspapers.

The parade wagons which were carried in 1903 that do not appear in the 1904 film are Asia, Europe, Africa, Little Red Riding Hood, Santa Claus, Cinderella, Old Woman in the Shoe, Old Mother Goose, Sindbad the Sailor, and the Phoenician Galley. Perhaps the Phoenician Galley was not used in 1904 as the spec was changed to the "Dubar of Delhi".

Although one

parade order for the 1898 summer tour of England filed at the Circus World Museum shows the pony floats immediately preceding the Steam Calliope at the end of the parade, all other photographic and printed evidence of the parade between 1898 and 1904 shows them following the elephant herd near the middle of the parade lineup.¹⁵ Since only two pony floats appear after the elephants in the Waterloo film, it is probable that none of the above six floats paraded on the day the movie was made.

A check of other known pictures of the 1904 parade confirms the apparent absence of the same parade wagons missing from the Waterloo film throughout the season. These included the Racine, Wisconsin set taken on August 6 (Pfening collection); the Battle Creek, Michigan set taken on June 8 (Thayer collection); photos taken in Kewanee, Illinois on July 23; photos taken in Duluth, Minnesota on August 20 (Florenz Family album at Circus World Museum), and photos from the MacCaddon albums (copies in Thayer collection).

Circumstantial evidence points to the fact that the existing movie could have been the one that was made in Waterloo, Iowa in 1904. A letter from P. M. McClintock to Fred Pfening reports the date of the film as 1904. The summer foliage and residential background suggest a parade route in a city well past springtime. And the absence of the

six pony floats and some of the continental floats in the movie is more likely to have reflected attrition from two long seasons than a parade "fresh out of winter quarters" in 1903.

Positive confirmation that the movie was taken in Waterloo came after a careful examination of the 35 mm negative now preserved at Circus World Museum. It was discovered that the lettering on a small horse drawn delivery wagon pass-



The appearance of this delivery wagon for Welch's helped historians to identify the parade as taking place in Waterloo, Iowa on August 27, 1904.

Circus World Museum



The King's Float was also featured in one of the 1903 posters printed by Strobridge Lithographing Co.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

ing before the camera in the opposite direction of the parade, was readable. On its back doors were painted: "Car-pets" and below that "Dry Goods." Faintly visible on the wagon's side was the name of the establishment, "Welch's." Advertisements in every August, 1904 issue of the *Waterloo Times Tribune* supplied by the State Historical Society in Iowa City, Iowa, verified that a Welch's dry goods store was prominent in Waterloo at the time.

Barnum & Bailey's final engagement of 1904 was a 14 day stand in Chicago's Coliseum. Since no street parade was given in Chicago,¹⁶ it seems logical that the non-performing elements of the parade were sent back to Bridgeport with the canvas and seats following the last outdoor stand in Springfield, Missouri on October 1, 1904.

Barnum & Bailey's

street parade was discontinued after the season of 1904. In its place, a free act was presented on the exhibition grounds. A newspaper advertisement for the show's engagement in San Francisco in 1905 read, "No street parade will be made, but a high class and very expensive Free Show will be given on the show grounds twice daily." The act which appeared was the high-wire act of Jean and Marie Weitzman, who performed to the accompaniment of a small brass band.

The street parade was not revived until after James A. Bailey died in April, 1906 and the Ringling Bros. took control of the Barnum show in 1908.

What conclusions can be reached about James Bailey's last parades of 1903 and 1904? First,

they differed relatively little in quality or size from any other parade that Bailey produced during his quarter century association with *The Greatest Show on Earth*. The parade orders on file at Circus World Museum show a unit range as follows: 46 to 59 units in 1881, 51 units in 1889, 45 units in 1891, 46 units in 1893, 45 units in 1895, 59 units in 1896,



Photographer Frederick W. Glasier photographed the King's Float on the lot in 1903.

The Ringling Museum, Frederick W. Glasier Collection

51 units in 1898, and 46 units in 1904.

Also they differed very little from the parades presented in Europe between 1898 and 1900. Although the content was different because of the addition of the new Sebastian wagons and a few other substitutions in 1903, the size of the parade and the arrangement of units was essentially the same.

Even on a day to day basis, the parade orders seldom fluctuated. The placement of the bandwagons, tableaux, pony floats, elephants, groups of cage wagons and steam calliope was routinely the same. There was nothing catch-as-catch-can about the parade order.¹⁷

Why was the parade discontinued after 1904? While it seems fairly clear that the ultimate reason involved the overall cost of staging the parade coupled with the parade no longer being deemed an absolutely necessary expense, the 1905 Barnum & Bailey *Realm* offers several other clues to be considered. In a story about the termination of the parade, the following reasons were set forth. (1) The idea of parading was old and antiquated. (2) The parade hindered business and traf-

fic. (3) The liability of delay and late arrivals meant that the parade crowds often had to wait past the advertised parade starting time. (4) The parade demoralized the attendance at schools. Certainly these first four reasons can be discarded as illegitimate as they would have been of very little consequence to any showman of the day.

Judging from the experience of the 1903 and 1904 seasons, the next four reasons stated in the *Realm* were probable factors playing in the decision to discontinue the parade. (5) Late parades meant late shows and a loss of money to the circus. (6) Without the parade, the workers' efforts could be concentrated on erecting the show. (7) The railroads could not efficiently handle large numbers of show cars and the extra parade equipment added to the burden by requiring additional flatcars. (8) The street parade exhausted the horses, elephants, and showpeople.¹⁸

Another factor to be consid-



Other new parade floats were featured in the Strobridge posters that year.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection



The Queen's Float carried a performer costumed as Balkis, here identified as Cleopatra, on the circus lot in 1903.

The Ringling Museum, Frederick W. Glasier Collection



A view of the Two Hemispheres Bandwagon pulled by a 40 horse hitch under an elevated railroad track in Brooklyn, New York in 1903.

Circus World Museum

ered is the "gentlemen's agreement" that was reached between the Ringlings and Bailey, to cooperate and coordinate the routing of their shows. This followed the January 10, 1905 auction of Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus, which culminated in Bailey's purchase of the show and his subsequent "rigged" sale¹⁹ of one half interest in that circus to the Ringling Bros. Logically, this agreement contributed toward the elimination of the need for Bailey's competitively large parade.

A multiplicity of reasons including railroad expenses, custom duties, narrow streets and the thesis that the free street parade was hurting ticket sales²⁰ (disputed by accounts in Barnum & Bailey In The Old World 1897-1901 route book) are thought to have played in the decision to terminate Barnum & Bailey's European street parade in October of 1900. Bailey may have been influenced by the European experience even though no evidence has been found to suggest that Bailey's "triumphant return parade" did anything but enhance business in the United States. It is doubtful that he believed the parade was keeping people away from the ticket wagons, however, he may have determined that the advertising requirement of a street pageant had become marginal.

Perhaps the growth of metropolitan areas meant that

patrons were not traveling such great distances to the circus as they were in the early days of railroad excursions. Maybe the observed urbanization of Europe and the recognition of the same trend occurring in the Eastern areas of the United States, swayed Bailey.²¹ Despite the fact that on a nationwide basis excursions were still at the peak of popularity,²² Bailey may have rationalized that the parade was no longer the required magnet that it had been thought to be for over 30 years.

Or perhaps the parade had simply become a giant albatross and Bai-

ley dismantled it to rid himself of a great burden that he had created.

The wisdom of Bailey's decision can be debated. On the one hand there is the report of a business slump coinciding with the absence of the parade, and the fact that the Ringlings were quick to restore the parade as soon as they were able. On the other hand, the need for streamlining the Barnum & Bailey Circus was seen by all, and the elimination of the parade was a step toward that end.

Otto Ringling immediately recognized the problems caused by the extreme weight of Barnum & Bailey's equipment when he took charge,²³ and he seriously considered abandoning the Two Hemispheres permanently.²⁴ Nevertheless, this massive bandwagon was utilized on Barnum & Bailey from 1908 through 1918. In fact, at least 10 of the 13 so-called "non-functional" 1903 Sebastian wagons were taken out of storage and paraded regularly by the Ringlings. It was not until about 1917 that the four continental floats were built up to carry cargo.

Perhaps the real significance of Bailey's last parade lies in the fact that its content almost totally represented the influence of an earlier era of parading history, and it provided one of the last good views of that marvelous parading era of elegant bandchariots, light narrow cages, telescoping

tableaux and exotic theme floats.

The great emphasis on parade wagon construction well into the 1880s had been on a style of vehicle which lacked any utilitarian capability. Falling into this category were not only the calliopes, bell wagons, pony floats and shell bandwagons, but also the tableau features. Wagons like Forepaugh's Five Graces, St. George & the Dragon and Cleopatra's Barge; Barnum's Temple of Juno; the Golden Horse bandwagons and Howes Great London's Chariots of India and Commerce were not built to double as baggage wagons. Similarly, only six of the 38 wagons shown in the 1904 movie could conceivably have carried any baggage.

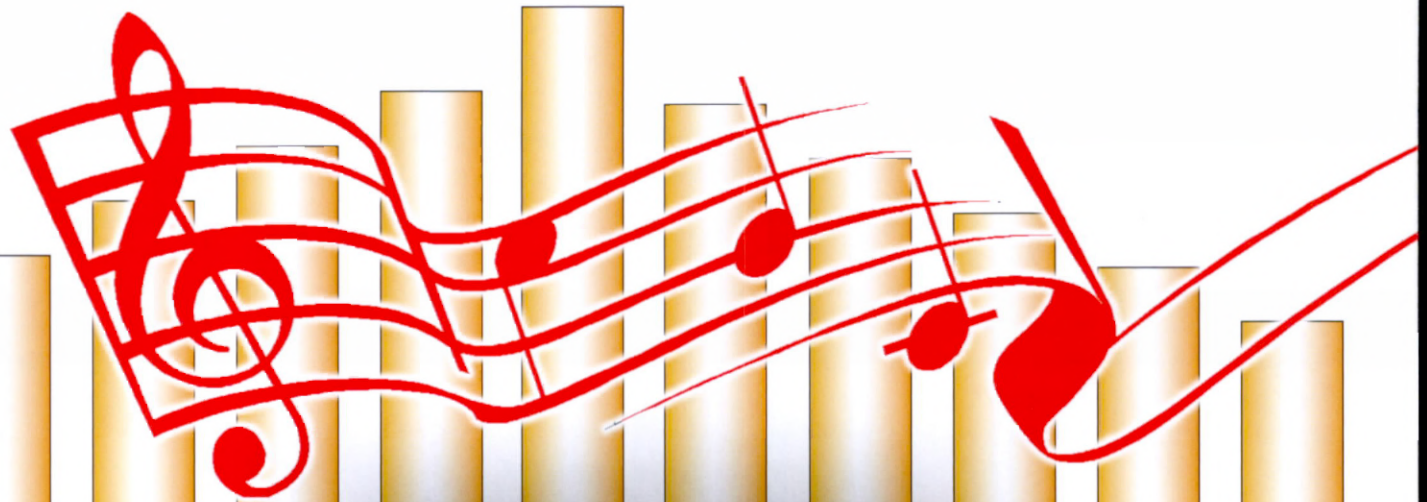
There are other examples of the earlier era's influence on Bailey's 1903-1904 parade, too. He had the four continental telescopers built, while telescoping tableau wagons had begun to vanish in the 1870s with the innovation of circus rail transportation and with the appearance of more and more telephone and telegraph wires in the early 1880s.²⁵ However, Bailey's "modern" telescopers apparently did not pose any particular difficulties since they were much lower than those of earlier showmen.

By the turn of the century, the basic style of newly constructed parade vehicles had shifted. As the cost of flatcar loading space escalated, circus owners and managers had begun to economize physically on the design of their parade equipment. Bandwagons and tableaux were built in more of a box-like manner so that they could accommodate a load. Cages were widened and reduced in number to better utilize the deck space on railroad flatcars. Bailey's old shell bandchariots, cages and 12 tableau-dens were beautiful, but not fashionable.

His shining star, or "Bailey's Folly"? While the debate over this issue will go on, there is no question (regardless of his motives) that Bailey pioneered the discontinuance of the horse drawn circus street parade. Although he may have been ahead of his time in that respect, it was not too many years before the Ringling Bros. followed his lead and Bailey's action became a trend. **Bw**

Endnotes

1. This circus was titled variously as P. T. Barnum's 1871-1880, Barnum & London 1881-1888, and Barnum & Bailey 1889-1918.
2. Richard E. Conover, "Historical Sketches of American Parade Wagons," (unpublished work, 1962).
3. The King of Babylon Float has often been referred to as King Neptune's Float in error. Its theme had nothing to do with the god of the sea.
4. *Billboard*, May 16, 1903, p. 7.
5. The original invoice and the receipts for payment dated April 1, 1903 for the Bode wagons are at Circus World Museum. Correspondence and invoices for the Milwaukee Ornamental Carving Co. wagons are in the Fred D. Pfening III collection.
6. George L. Chindahl, *A History of the Circus in America* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1959), p. 144.
7. *Billboard*, May 23, 1903, p. 9.
8. *Ibid.*, May 30, 1903, p. 9.
9. *New York Clipper*, July 4, 1903, p. 438.
10. *Billboard*, June 13, 1903, p. 7.
11. C. G. Sturtevant. "Circus Transportation," *Banner Line*, Oct. 1, 1952, p. 6.
12. Charles Andress, *Day By Day With Barnum & Bailey*, route book (By the Author, 1904), p.69.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
14. *Waterloo Times Tribune*, August 12, 1904, p.3.
15. This evidence includes the classic set of pictures of the parade assembling on the lot in Chester, England on October 10, 1898 and a lineup of the first British parade that was recorded in the April 10, 1898 edition of the *Manchester Empire* reprinted in *Banner Line*, Dec. 1, 1958, p. 9.
16. *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, October 2, 1904.
17. Stuart Thayer has pointed out that the parade orders of many large circuses were firmly dictated by loading orders, menagerie lineups, and the time frame of erecting and moving the show - as well as advertising impact and eye appeal.
18. "No Parade!" *The Realm*, 1905, pp. 45-47.
19. Richard E. Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*, (Xenia, Ohio: By the Author, 1957), p.16.
20. Jake Posey. *Last of the Forty-Horse Drivers*. (New York: Vantage Press, 1959), p. 49.
21. Richard Flint suggested this thought.
22. Tom Parkinson & Charles Philip Fox, *The Circus Moves By Rail*, (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1978), p. 236.
23. Otto Ringling, personal letter, October 12, 1907 cited by Charles Philip Fox, *A Ticket To The Circus*, (Seattle: Superior Publishing Company, 1959), p. 165.
24. Otto Ringling, personal letter cited by Richard E. Conover. "Notes on the Barnum & Bailey Show," *Bandwagon*, March/April, 1959, p. 3.
25. C. H. Amidon. "A History of Circus Parades in America," *The White Tops*, May-June, 1976, p. 43.



Joseph Ori and the Early Circus Air Calliope

by Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

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A sound which is symbolic of the outdoor amusement world is that of the calliope, an instrument now foreign to the ears of many, but which elicits joy and happiness in those same listeners after releasing only a few lilting notes. The word calliope usually brings to mind the steam powered whistler which was the signature of the circus, the floating theatre and the excursion steamboat. Its softer cousin, the air calliope, is seldom mentioned, its once common presence pushed into the background by memories of the more impressive steamers.

The air calliope was one of the most popular and plentiful mass entertainment musical instruments of the twentieth century. Considered as a group, the number of air calliopes constructed approaches that of the numerous bandorgans built and distributed by both domestic and foreign builders and agents. Several thousand were made, of which over a hundred survive today, primarily in the hands of collectors and museums. Surprisingly little has been written about the instrument or its history, but thankfully that which is in print is generally accurate, though sketchy.¹

The origins of the air calliope are ancient, its roots traceable to the pipe organs of Roman times. For practical purposes, it can be said the story of the air calliope starts much later, its beginnings associated with the first use of steam calliopes as advertising tools by the American circus of the 1870s. The steam calliope became a fixture of the circus in 1872, when the Great Eastern show featured a "steam piano" as part of its advertising assault on the residents. Within the decade the majority of the larger rail shows featured one of these devices at the end of their parades. It also served to dispense a ballyhoo on the lot immediately before show time. The bulk and expense of this limited duty asset restricted the acquisition of a steam calliope to the upper tier shows, those which had an adequate bankroll to purchase and transport one of the awkward and expensive instruments. Capable of delivering the loudest possible notice that the show was in town, the calliope was on the wish list of many showmen who needed a guaranteed method of advertising their presence.

The need to announce the show's arrival was not restricted to circus men, but shared by all showmen, including floating theatre owners, road show proprietors and street fair operators. The first step towards satisfying the needs of the lesser showmen was taken by George Kratz,



*The Ori air calliope played on the
Ringling Bros. and Barnum &
Bailey show circa 1940.*

Author's collection

the noted steam calliope builder from Evansville, Indiana. Developing an instrument quite different from those built previously, Kratz constructed a small calliope about 1903 utilizing a semi-circular manifold which could be operated by steam or compressed air. The volume of either medium required to operate the miniature calliope was but a fraction of that needed to operate one of the full size steamers. While the air pressure used to operate these Kratz hybrids is not known, it is believed to have been in the 10 to 50 pounds per square inch range. The employment of compressed air to power a calliope had been foreseen years earlier by Joshua C. Stoddard, who covered its use in one of the claims of his 1855 calliope patent. There is no known record of a calliope being operated by compressed air prior to Kratz's efforts, the application of compressed air apparently being stifled by the lack of a reasonably sized portable

air compressor.

Kratz's new calliope was well received, close to 30 instruments being accounted for in a recent survey. Others tried to build compressed air calliopes, and one firm even offered to convert steam calliopes to compressed air service, but all of these activities were rather short-lived episodes. The advent of the compressed air calliope satisfied the needs of some showmen; however, a wagon to carry its weight, and a knowledgeable individual to operate it were still required.

Road shows and street fair operators who gilleed their shows from baggage cars, sometimes in conjunction with that new travel invention, the automobile, required a very portable instrument, one capable of being moved by the efforts of one to two men. It also had to be sufficiently simple to permit operation by the multitude of piano artists com-



The 49 whistle pneumatic air calliope at the center of this group photo of the 1915 Barnum & Bailey band led by Ned Brill.

Author's collection

mon in the industry. Although efforts dating to the 1890s can be cited, the first successful low pressure air calliope was constructed in 1905-1906 by Joseph Ori, a longtime showman who was then serving as barker, accordion player, and mechanic for Capt. Louis Sorcho's Deep Sea Divers show. Sorcho's business had been sagging during a tour of the western United States, and after dismissing the steam calliope as too heavy and too costly, Ori told Sorcho he believed that he could construct an air powered calliope. Possibly he was inspired by the machinery used to feed air to the divers in Sorcho's glass fronted show tank.

Hampered by having to work on the road but aided by the machine tools Sorcho commonly carried, Ori succeeded in creating an air calliope which proved an invaluable asset to Sorcho's show wherever it traveled. With the calliope mounted in the back seat position on an early roadster, Sorcho would drive the vehicle around the towns and cities being visited for hours on end, making sure no citizen could escape the fact that his show was in town. Travelling with Sorcho's show for the next four years, Ori had to leave the calliope behind when he left Sorcho's employ in 1910, settling in Bloomfield, New Jersey, with his brother, James, and determined to earn a living by building air calliopes.

Ori was not the only individual to build a low pressure air calliope at the time, but since his machines embodied

the general design principles which were later mimicked by others, he can rightly be considered the father of the air calliope. It took about three or four calliopes before this standard arrangement was reached, but by the time the fifth calliope was sold to the Johnny J. Jones carnival, Ori's design had become fixed. The details which characterized Ori's calliopes include a free standing group of chromatic brass whistles, connected via tubing to a valve chest, the valves operated by a set of keys having the same arrangement as a piano keyboard.

The whistles sat atop a compact sheet metal enclosure with the whistles arranged in an attractive manner in front of the keyboard. Air was supplied by a rotary blower, such as those manufactured by the Roots firm of Connersville, Indiana. Altogether the air calliope and its blower weighed 200 to 300 pounds and could easily be moved about by two men. As examples of designs which were not successful, one can site the bamboo whistle calliopes of the Armbruster Company or the peculiar calliopes made by Sam Day which were powered by the exhaust of automobiles. Any four cylinder automobile had adequate exhaust pressure to power one.

The air calliopes operated at pressures which were a fraction of those used by compressed air calliopes. Early air machines operated at pressures as high as several pounds per square inch, but later instruments were tuned to function at levels of one pound or less.

By 1912 Ori had established his firm, the Pneumatic Calliope Company, and moved it from a Newark storefront to a Bloomfield building. Known as Joseph E. Dupont among the showfolk, Ori's ability to produce calliopes was outstripped by the demand. Made with only hand powered tools and the assistance of his brother and nephews at night, the early Ori calliopes were essentially handmade and were not made to order, but simply sold after Ori advised showmen that another calliope was ready.

It was the Ringlings who first attempted to purchase an Ori calliope in early 1912, dispatching John H. Snellen from the Barnum show at Bridgeport to Ori's plant with the intent of having an instrument delivered to Baraboo prior to April 1. The Ringlings were acting in response to a letter from Ori, but wanted the unit inspected before committing themselves, desiring to be assured that the Pneumatic calliope was a practical and rugged unit. Snellen sent a favorable report to the Ringlings, but by the time the authorization for the purchase was received Ori had already sold the instrument to another party.

Not wanting to miss the opportunity to place one of his units on the World's Greatest Shows, Ori again wrote the Ringlings on January 9, 1913 offering another air calliope, characterizing it as "positively the best we ever built." Ori advised the Ringlings he would hold the unit long enough to permit both an inspection by one of their representatives and a positive response to be received from Baraboo. The calliope, complete with a blower, small tank, siren whistle, and a pedal to alter the volume, was offered for \$625.00, a base or stand being \$25.00 extra.² Acting quickly, the Ringlings wrote the Barnum & Bailey show manager, Sam McCrackin, two days later, informing him of the 1912 mix up, and advising McCrackin to take Snellen along to the Pneumatic plant. They suggested closing the deal on the spot if the instrument was satisfactory.³

On January 15, 1913, McCrackin and Snellen visited the Pneumatic plant, and after hearing several selections, bought one of the instruments for the Ringling show. Before leaving the premises they purchased a second one for the Barnum show, Ori confirming the orders in a telegram to the Ringlings the same day. McCrackin wrote Al Ringling on January 16, advising him that the purchase price had been discounted from \$650

to \$600 and noting that "The tone of the Calliope is more musical and carries farther than the steam [calliope] and is a very small affair."⁴

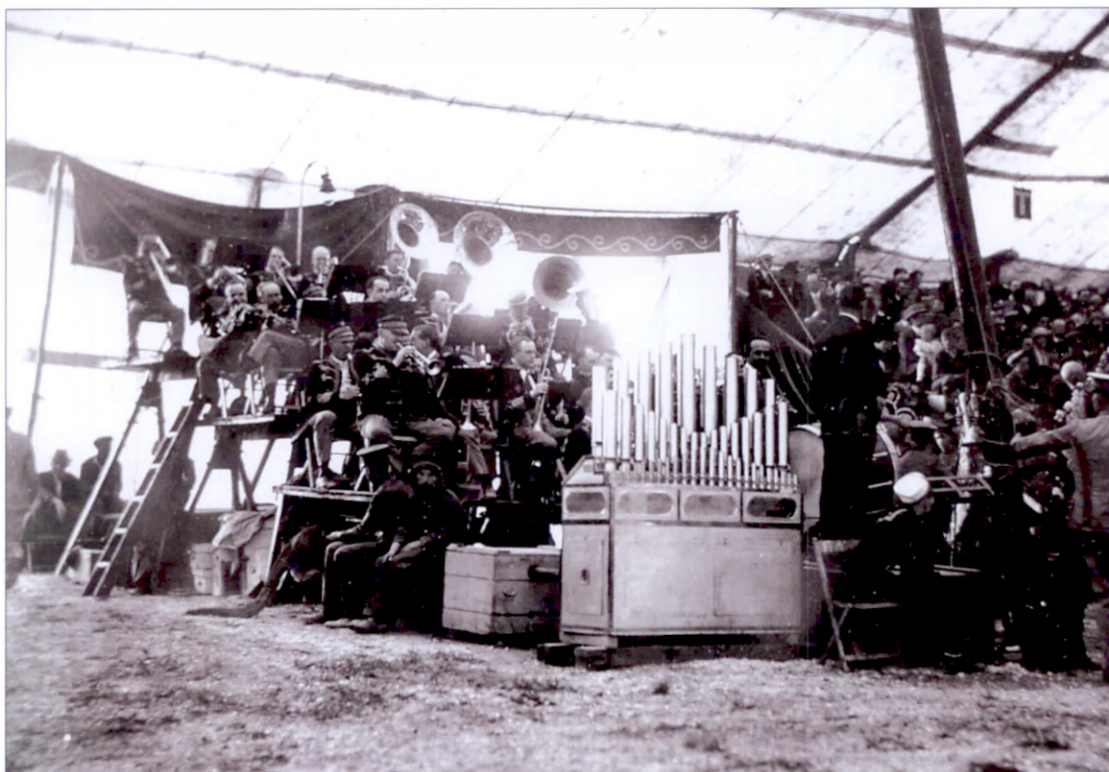
As instructed by McCrackin, Ori also wrote the Ringlings on January 16, describing the calliopes which were sold as having 43 whistles, ranging from F to B, not including the adjustable siren whistle. The show had to provide the gas engine to power the blower, a two or three horsepower unit being required. A good muffler was recommended to avoid having the exhaust interfere with the music. Ori also confirmed the price discount of \$50 on the Ringling calliope, but advised \$100 had been cut from the Barnum show unit.⁵ Not to be shorted \$25 on a two calliope deal, one of the Ringlings wrote McCrackin on January 18 and indicated the price for either calliope should be \$575, an arrangement McCrackin assented to in his January 21 response.

The Ringing calliope was expressed to Baraboo on February 3, 1913, with the Barnum unit shipped to Madison Square Garden in time for the show's March 22 opening date. Prior to their dispatch, a grand concert was held at the Pneumatic plant "to demonstrate the superiority of the Mammoth Air Calliopes," as the account of the event was worded in the *Billboard*. Professor Holden, a piano player from Bloomfield, entertained the audience with selections of classical music, while Miss Freda Kunze of Newark pro-



Hagenbeck-Wallace installed their 1915 Pneumatic air calliope in the old Great Wallace eagle chariot.

Otto Scheiman Collection



Merle Evans band on Ringling-Barnum, seen here circa 1920, used the 49 whistle Ori calliopo into the 1940s.

Pfening Archives

vided ragtime melodies. Present in the audience were E. S. "Ned" Brill, the bandleader of the Barnum & Bailey show, and Matt Meeker, a cornetist and pianist who had been selected to play the calliopo in the big show band.

The first circus use of an air calliopo came during the March 22, 1913 matinee of the Barnum show at Madison Square Garden. The *Billboard* review of the event recorded the addition of the instrument to Brill's band, noting "If there is one instrument in the world that is indigenous to the show business it is the calliopo. There is circus in its every note."⁶ Ori cited Brill about the same time, his ad in the March 22 *Billboard* noting that Brill felt a brass band was incomplete without a calliopo. The Ringling instrument debuted in Chicago on April 5, 1913, and thus did a long association between the circus and the air calliopo have its origin.

Following the placement of his calliopes on the Barnum & Bailey and Ringling shows, Ori encountered little difficulty in selling additional instruments to the other big shows. Sells Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, John Robinson, Sparks, Barnes, and others all procured Pneumatic calliopes during the mid-1910s, making Joe Ori a welcome visitor to many circus lots. The Pneumatics proved to be reliable calliopes, serving 30 to 40 years in circus use before expiring

from abuse or being allowed to retire to a quarters barn or preservation.

The Ringlings intended to use the new calliopes both in the big show band and in the parade. To facilitate this, they arranged for the construction of a new wagon by their cousins, the Moellers, who operated a wagon building concern in the Ringling's winter quarters town of Baraboo, Wisconsin. The wagon's design recalled the full roof steam calliopo wagons built by Henry Ohlsen in the early

1890s. It featured a large kidney shaped opening on the sides, with a carved oval below the center of the hole. The sides and back door were covered with carvings typical of those the Moellers used to decorate the cages and dens built for the Ringlings. The air calliopo was placed crosswise, in the center of the wagon, with the player facing the rear, the calliopo's blower and gas engine being located behind the player in the front half of the wagon. Later the calliopo was turned around, so that the player faced towards the front of the wagon, and wasn't seated beside the gas engine.

A new wagon was also constructed to house and carry the Barnum & Bailey calliopo, but the identity of its builder has not been confirmed. Its overall execution, however, suggests it too was a product of the Moeller firm. Simpler in style than the Ringling vehicle, the ornamentation on the Barnum & Bailey wagon consisted primarily of scrolled carvings. Photographs of the wagon on Barnum & Bailey are rare, in contrast to the rather common views of the Ringling wagon.

The adoption of the air calliopo as a parade feature didn't always meet with enthusiasm. When the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows played Atlanta on October 9, 1916, the air calliopo's presence in the early part of the parade caused many Georgians to think: the parade had come

to a premature end. According to the reporter present, "everybody who heard it coming said 'that's all I reckon,' and started to go home, for everybody knows that the steam piano is the very last thing in a circus parade." The scribe noted it was the Pneumatic Calliope Co. instrument which had caused the confusion. Everyone was elated when the parade didn't end but continued, and happy when "The regular calliope came along at long last, where it belonged. It was a real steam piano, with black smoke rolling out of the stove pipe and the whistles moaning and screeching and everybody was pleased. There was considerable criticism of the way the circus people tried to fool everybody by running in two calliopes on them."⁷

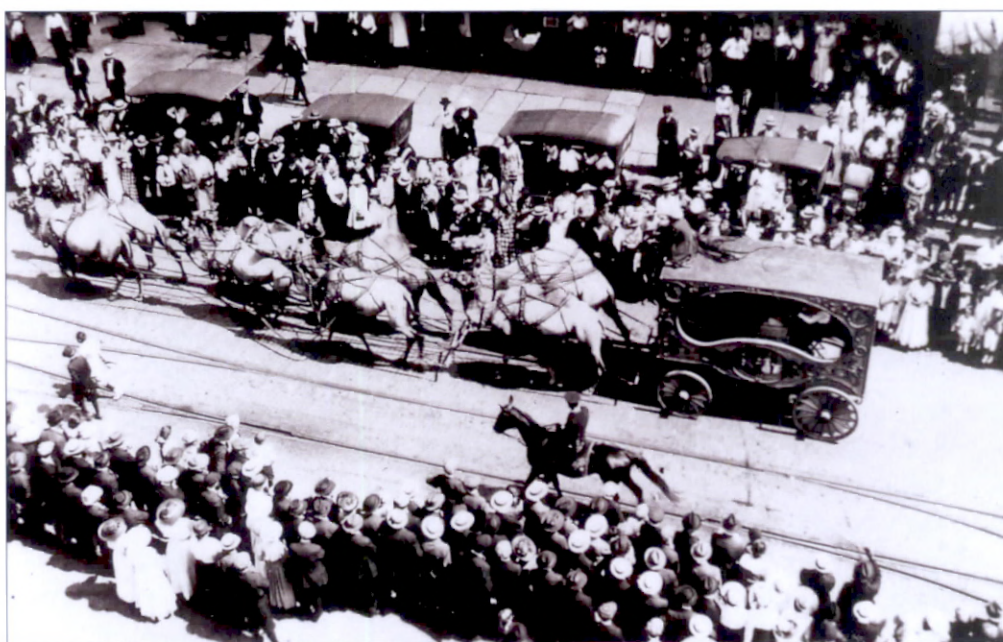
The desire to avoid shifting the air calliope from the parade wagon to the bandstand combined with an apparent desire for an instrument more suitable for use in the band, led to the later construction of a 49 whistle Pneumatic calliope for the Barnum & Bailey show. The exact date of its origin is not known as the contract documents have apparently been destroyed. Four decades after it was built, Ori's nephew, Peter George Ori, stated it was made the winter of 1912-1913, but it is believed his memory was confused by the construction of the two 43 whistle instruments that winter. The surviving Ringling-Ori correspondence of early 1913 makes no mention of it, and reading the letters one senses none of the Ringling personnel were familiar with the Pneumatic calliope at that time. These circumstances would indicate the big calliope was built for the 1914 or 1915 show, as its first documented appearance is in a pan view of the show's band published in the September 11, 1915 issue of *Billboard*. In a 1938 interview, Joseph Ori himself indicated it had been built in 1914. Looking like an enlarged 43 whistle unit, it is identifiable by the larger number of whistles and the presence of three oval access ports below the whistles. The standard 43 whistle Pneumatic has only two ports in this location.

Bandleader Brill was the apparent pusher for the new instrument, Ori's nephew recalling years later that Brill

visited the Pneumatic plant many times during its construction. Except for one known instance, the 49 whistle Pneumatic was used exclusively in the big show band, being disassembled and placed in a trunk after the show, and transported in the baggage wagon which carried the other band props. The calliope was used continuously through 1941 when it was replaced by a Hammond organ as part of the North brothers effort to modernize the show. It was then used on the side show front in the 1950s, after which it was relegated to storage at the Sarasota winter quarters where it was rescued from oblivion by noted restorer Thomas A. White, who donated the historic instrument to the Circus World Museum in 1974. It can be heard there daily during the summer season as part of the circus performances.

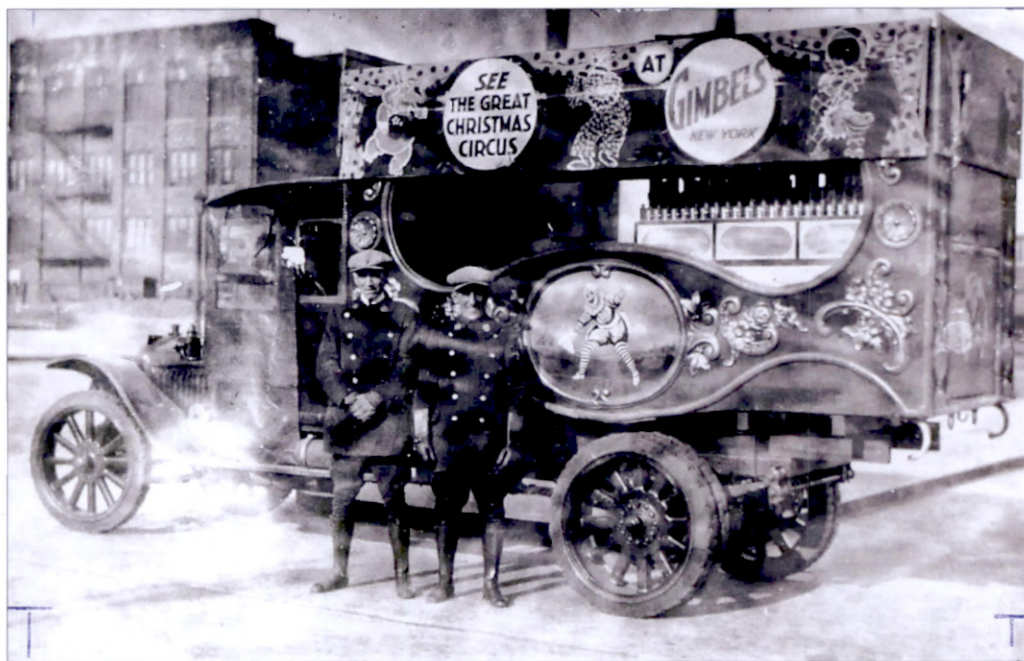
Ned Brill left the Barnum & Bailey show following the 1918 tour and the Ringlings secured Merle Evans as bandleader of the new combined shows band in 1919. Holding the bandleader's job through 1969, Evans was in daily contact with the big Ori calliope for 22 years and provided information concerning its use in the band. Evans indicated that in 1919 the calliope was played in the key of C, which was changed to B flat in 1920. This allowed the player to directly use the solo cornet part of the music without having to transpose it. The player did not "fake" any music, following the solo cornet parts and thus giving keyboard playing cornet players the inside track for the calliope position.⁸

The success and popularity of the Pneumatic calliope on the 1913 Ringling show inspired Charles Ringling to



The Ringling air calliope pulled by an eight camel hitch in Hornell, New York around 1918.

Pfening Archives



The Ringling calliope wagon temporarily housing the 49 whistle Barnum & Bailey air calliope for a 1920s Christmas promotion by Gimbel Brothers in New York.

A. Bruce Tracy Collection

write his brother Al concerning the possibility of adding a second unit in 1914. Charles advised "I would also add another small air calliope on as small a wagon as possible, which would be used in the side show, and in street parade, and as they are playing all the time they add life to the parade and it would be a sure money getter in the side show. If we wanted to add two more and cut out the steam calliope it might be a good thing. It would save buying coal, hauling water, getting up steam, and a six horse trip for the baggage stock. They are always in tune and sound much better than the old style calliope."⁹ The second air calliope would also permit the show to dispense with the ticket sellers band which, from Ringling's description, was a sad affair. Similar thought of dispensing with the steamers had occurred to other showmen following the advent of a successful air calliope. This opportunity to replace the steamer was offered by Norman Baker, a Muscatine, Iowa builder of calliopes who had just entered the business.

Baker was Ori's only serious competition in the air calliope business before 1920. His firm, the Tanglely Manufacturing Company, produced a calliope which mimicked those of Ori, having 43 whistles ranging from F to B and an adjustable siren whistle. However, it featured a simpler arrangement, having all the whistles mounted at one level, instead of in Ori's stepped, cascading arrangement. Tanglely's first customers are unknown, but it does not appear that the

legend specifying the first buyer as carnival proprietor James Patterson is accurate. The question of which calliope, Ori's or Baker's, was better is a moot point, but the mass produced Tanglely calliope would far outsell the handmade Pneumatic calliope. Prior to 1920, the prolific Tanglelys would outsell the Pneumatics everywhere except in the circus field, where Ori's machines were the rule rather than the exception.

Waiting to investigate the steamer replacement for one year, on August 17, 1914 one of the Ringlings finally wrote the Tanglely firm regarding the air calliopes they built,

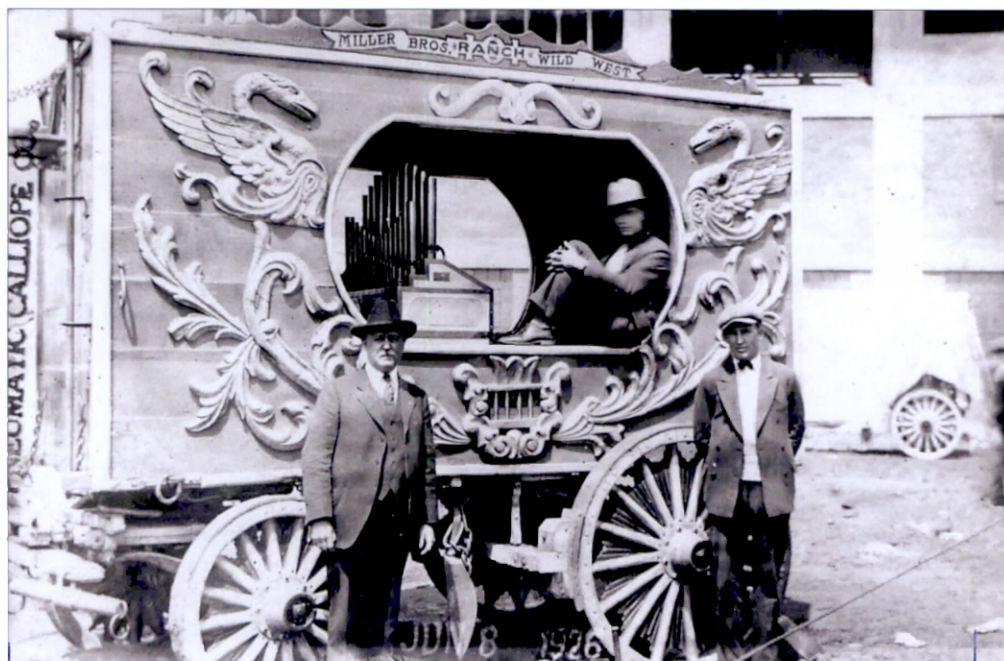
apparently inquiring about the largest and most powerful instrument they could produce.¹⁰ Baker proposed building a super compressed air calliope with two keyboards and 50 whistles, ranging in size from several inches to four feet long, tuned for operation at 10 P.S.I.¹¹ The complete calliope with a blower and gas engine was priced at \$2175, almost four times the price the Ringlings had paid for steam and air calliopes in 1913. Tanglely's sales pitch was that the air calliope would "enable you to do away with your large steam machine and its smoke and fuel troubles."¹² In a follow up letter Baker advised that the Sells Floto show was contemplating buying an even bigger air calliope from Tanglely, a statement made to arouse concern in the Ringling camp that one of their biggest competitors might have a machine superior to that owned by the Ringlings.¹³ It was Al Ringling, the recipient of Charles' original idea, who advised Tanglely they would continue using their steam calliope and "defer the building of the big machine for another season."¹⁴

Sells Floto also passed up the big Tanglely machine and later that same year Charles Sparks threatened to replace his steamer with an air calliope, only to relent and purchase a bigger steam calliope than the one he owned previously.¹⁵ To the best of our knowledge, only one air calliope replaced a steam calliope until well into the 1920s, the big steamers continuing to hold down the final position in the circus

parade until the wagon style parade itself passed from the scene. There can be no doubt, however, that the invention of the air calliope limited the sales of new steam calliopes to all but their traditional roles in the railroad circus, on excursion steamboats and aboard floating theatres. The air machine would be the instrument specified to satisfy the parade needs of the motorized circuses of the 1920s and 1930s.

To complete the story of the first air calliope wagons, when the Ringling and Barnum & Bailey circuses were combined into one show following the 1918 season, three air calliopes became available for the 1919 tour. Aware of their entertainment value, the Ringlings used all three in both 1919 and 1920, the big 49 whistle Pneumatic in the band and the two 43 whistle Pneumatics and their wagons in the parade. After the 1920 tour and the abandonment of the parade for 1921, the two 43 whistle machines and their wagons were relegated to storage at the show's Bridgeport winter quarters.

One of the late Bill Woodcock's many recollections concerning the transfer of circus assets involved the sale of an air calliope from the Bridgeport winter quarters to the Nat Reiss carnival in the 1920s. Woodcock's source placed it at 53 whistles, a size made only by E. A. Harrington and the National Calliope Company. There is no confirmation either builder ever placed an instrument on the Ringling-Barnum show, and it is likely the instrument was actually one of the 43 whistle Ori calliopes of 1913, probably the one which originally resided in the Ringling wagon. This hypothesis is based upon the presence of the 49 whistle Barnum & Bailey Pneumatic in the Ringling calliope wagon during a special promotion for a post 1918 Christmas sale at the Gimbel Brothers' New York store. For the Gimbels appearance the Ringling wagon body was removed from its original wagon gears and placed on a straight-bed truck. The width of the 49 whistle Ori precluded placing it in the normal crosswise manner, and thus it was placed in a rather awkward longitudinal position in the rear of the body.¹⁶ If the original 43 whistle instrument was still avail-



Joseph Ori (at left) in a 1926 photograph of the 101 Ranch Wild West's air calliope. Note the distinctive three level arrangement of the whistles.

A. Bruce Tracy Collection

able, it is logical that it would have been in the wagon, and not the oversize 49 whistle calliope. Unfortunately the dates of both the Reiss purchase and the Gimbels promotion are unknown at the present time.

The Ringling air calliope wagon appears intact in a photograph taken after the February 2, 1924 fire which destroyed one of the large barns at the Bridgeport winter quarters, negating the possibility that it was destroyed in that conflagration. Since the 49 whistle Ori calliope remained a Ringling-Barnum fixture until years later, the chance that the Ringling wagon went permanently to Gimbels is rather remote. It also was not included in the large group of wagons sold to George Christy in 1925 which marked the beginning of the end of the Bridgeport quarters. Except for its possible inclusion in the sale to the Reiss carnival, nothing has been found to indicate the ultimate disposition of the 1913 Ringling air calliope wagon.

Another note provided by Bill Woodcock pins down the final days of the 1913 Barnum & Bailey air calliope wagon. It too survived the 1924 Bridgeport fire and was on the train which departed from Bridgeport for Sarasota on May 3, 1927 carrying usable equipment still remaining at the Connecticut site. At an undetermined date, one of the Ringling-Barnum assistant boss animal men cut off the top of the wagon and converted it into a manure wagon for use at the Sarasota quarters, much to the chagrin of show manager Carl Hathaway who had intended to sell it. The

disposition of the instrument it once carried remains uncertain.

Joseph Ori continued to build calliopes through the 1920s but the onset of the depression wiped out much of the need for new instruments, and he could no longer support himself on the repair business. Seeking other employment, Ori continued to repair calliopes as a sideline until his death in the early 1940s. Today only a few Pneumatic calliopes survive, but their quality bears testimony to the skill and care of the man who made them.

A note of thanks is due Joseph T. Bradbury, Merle Evans and Robert L. Parkinson of the Circus World Museum for their contributions. Special credit is due Fred D. Pfening III for supplying the

AIR CALLIOPE



Leon W. Washburn's Air Calliope

If you are looking for some "CHEAP EXCESS BAGGAGE" we don't have it, but if you want good workmanship, a good flash and a real KROUD KATCHER, the only place to get it is only 45 MINUTES FROM BROADWAY.

PNEUMATIC CALLIOPE CO., 403 Broad Street, Bloomfield, N. J.

The only practical AIR CALLIOPE builders in the WORLD. Order now for season 1915.

A pneumatic calliope replaced one of Kratz's hybrid machines when this wagon went from Sig Sautelle's Circus to Leon Washburn's Carnival. This ad is from the March 21, 1914 Billboard.

Author's collection

Ringling correspondence in his collection, and to Mrs. Betty O. Hagen for information concerning Joseph Ori. **BW**

Endnotes

1. Q. David Bowers. *Encyclopedia of Automatic Musical Instruments* (Vestal, N.Y.: Vestal Press. 1972) pp. 838-844 is the best discussion of air calliopes currently available, but the material given is necessarily limited by the scope of Bowers' volume.
2. Letter from Joseph E. Dupont to Ringling Bros. dated January 9, 1913. All of the Ori-Ringling correspondence is in the collection of Fred D. Pfening III, who has kindly allowed the author to present it here.
3. Letter from Ringling Bros. to Samuel McCrackin dated January 11, 1913.
4. Letter from Samuel McCrackin to Al Ringling dated January 16, 1913.
5. Letter from Joseph E. Dupont to Ringling Bros. dated January 16, 1913.
6. *Billboard*. March 29, 1913, p. 6.
7. Dudley Glass. "Calliope Near Parade Front Just One of Circus Surprises; Another One In Usual Place," *The Atlanta Georgian*. October 9, 1916. Courtesy Robert Brisendine.
8. Letters from Merle Evans to the author dated May 19 and June 9, 1983.
9. Letter from Charles Ringling to Al Ringling dated August 26, 1913. Fred D. Pfening III collection.
10. The Ringling letter of August 17, 1914 is lost. The inquiry is discernible from the Tangley response dated August 18, 1914. The Baker-Ringling correspondence is in the Fred D. Pfening III collection.
11. Letter from N. Baker, Tangley Manufacturing Company to Mr. Ringling dated October 4, 1914.
12. *Ibid*.
13. Letter from N. Baker to Mr. Ringling dated October 19, 1914.
14. Letter from Al Ringling to Tangley Manufacturing Company dated November 11, 1914.
15. *Billboard*. December 12, 1914. p. 43.
16. A. Bruce Tracy Collection.

The Ringling Bros. air calliope was part of the show's street parade advertised by this Strobridge poster printed in 1913.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection



RINGLING

BROS

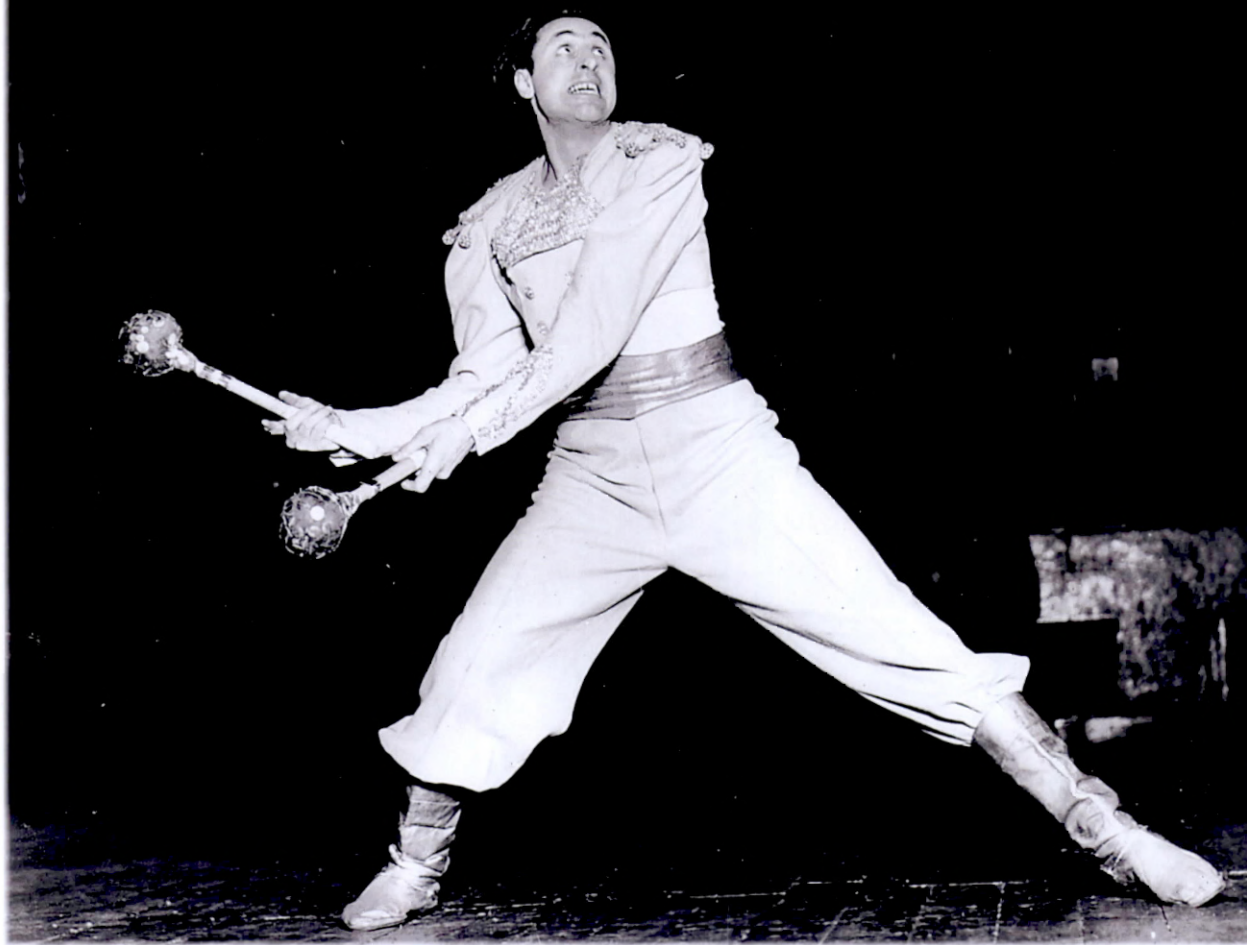
**FREE
STREET
PARADE**

**GREATEST THE WORLD
HAS EVER SEEN**

**10 O'CLOCK A.M.
PRECEDING FIRST EXHIBITION**

Notes toward a History of Juggling

by Marcello Truzzi with Massimiliano Truzzi



Massimiliano Truzzi, father of the author, came to the United States to perform his astounding juggling feats in the center ring of the Ringling circus in 1940.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

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© Copyright 1974 by Marcello Truzzi

Although numerous works exist outlining the basic techniques of juggling – how-to books – there has been a remarkable paucity of information available about its history. Similar problems exist with most of the great folk arts of the

circus. Though there is much information available through interviews with still active performers, such occupational history continues to be neglected. What follows is a brief attempt at such cultural salvage, in part with the hope of encouraging others to collect similar facts about other circus arts.

as a Hussar. Another great kraft-juggler was Paul Spadoni, also a German. Most of the great kraft-jugglers were German, but it was apparently the vogue to take Italian names. Spadoni came into the ring dressed as a Roman on a chariot. He then dismissed the horses and proceeded to balance the chariot on his head. One of his typical tricks was done with a small spring-board. He would drop a cannon-ball on the board which would send another into the air, and he would catch the ball in flight upon the back of his neck. Spadoni, born in 1870, copied Scheffer who was well known around 1900. Contemporary with Scheffer were Paul Cinquevalli and Kara. Weight juggling is almost obsolete today.

The second popular form of juggling was salon juggling by the juggler Mondain. The German juggler Kara (who often claimed to be American) has often been called the first salon juggler, but he is preceded by Aqoust, a typical juggler of 1860 to 1886 who staged his act in a restaurant setting. The salon juggler was one who usually worked in formal dress and juggled such objects as his cane, gloves, top hat or derby, and articles to be found in the drawing room such as flower bouquets, billiard balls and cues. Kara seems to have been the greatest of the salon jugglers. Kara was taught by Pospischil, the manager of a trapeze duo, who in turn was taught by Scheffer. Juggling has seemingly always been an oral tradition, taught by one practitioner to another. Another great salon juggler was Salerno (also German). He was a particularly great inventor of new juggling tricks and apparatus. Although he used some artificial effects employing "gimmicks," he was nevertheless a very excellent artist. Possibly the greatest modern salon juggler is

the German artist, Adanos.

Although we are, in this discussion, classifying jugglers into specialized categories, most jugglers still combined into their acts many of these forms. A good example of this more eclectic type of juggling was Paul Cinquevalli (another German, born in Posen, whose real name was Lehmann-Braun) who achieved great fame in England at the turn of the century. He entered dressed in a leotard and tights and performed many balancing feats and some weight juggling.

A third specialization was that of the equestrian juggler, that is, the performer who would juggle while standing upon the back of a moving horse. Probably the greatest of these was Briatori. He was the first (and possibly the last) to juggle seven balls while standing on a moving horse! Another great equestrian juggler, Nicolai Nikitin (the son of the famous Russian circus owner), was a particularly great showman and was also a very fine salon juggler when he exercised his skill on the ground. Another great equestrian juggler was Enrico Truzzi, the father of Massimiliano Truzzi, the greatest juggler in the generation following Enrico Rastelli's death.

A fourth form of juggling is that of the antipodist. An antipodist is one who juggles objects with his feet. Generally, jugglers think of antipodism as a separate form of juggling. Although it can be very well done and can be very difficult, it is relatively limited in its possibilities and generally consists of balancing and/or spinning of objects upon the feet while lying upon the back. This form of juggling is most often combined with other forms of dexterity. Quite often it is found in combination with acrobatics, the one performer "juggling" the



Adanos was billed as the "Gentleman Juggler" in this 1949 poster.
The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

other with his feet while the latter performs somersaults, etc. This form of antipodism is not usually considered a form of juggling, and its practitioners are known as icarians. Although there have been many Oriental antipodists, the greatest icarians seem to have been Europeans, especially Germans and Hungarians.

The fifth and final classification of these early jugglers is that of the group jugglers. This consists of more than one person juggling the same objects back and forth. A fine example of this category was the well-known French family, the Perezoffs, which at one time consisted of 11 persons. Another very fine group juggling act was the Amoros family, a German troupe, one of whose members was the first recorded person to ever juggle nine balls in the air at one time. There have been many group juggling acts in the past, but they are slowly becoming extinct. It is today more financially practical for acts to be small, and this applies not only to juggling acts; jugglers today usually work as singles or sometimes as duos. There are some group jugglers, but their caliber is not comparable to those of the past. Some of the great group juggling acts were the Mangadors, the Arizonas, the Aicardis and the D'Angolys (who, by the way, are related to the Briatori family).

The early 1900s brought the end of these specialized schools of juggling. Although there still exist persons doing many of the tricks which were performed, the classifications no longer exist in a pure state. The weight jugglers are no longer seen, and the equestrian juggler seems also to have disappeared. Group juggling is passing from the

scene, and there seem to be fewer and fewer antipodists, although there are still quite a few icarians left in acrobatics. Salon juggling still remains with us in part, but not in the old sense. Performers still work with top hats and canes, but the specialization is essentially gone.

One thing more must be mentioned: the Oriental jugglers. There is, very unfortunately, very little record of even these early European jugglers, and the fate of the early

Oriental jugglers who so greatly influenced the art is much more clouded in obscurity. Although we today think of the Oriental jugglers primarily in terms of the much over-done and over-emphasized plate spinning, many of them were expert in other forms. Since they were members of a strange minority group and "outsiders" to the average European, their sometimes magnificent feats were underestimated. Somehow the viewers seemed to impute these visitors from the East with a natural talent for such difficult techniques. Because of this, the individual names of some of these performers just were not noted, and their feats were not fully described. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to note the important influence which they have had upon this ancient art. It is significant that Lau Laura was



This circa 1889 Strobridge poster printed for the Mikado Troupe appearing on the Sells Bros. Circus includes a central figure demonstrating some of the balancing feats that were important skills within many Asian juggling acts.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

the first recorded performer who specialized in juggling to be found in Europe. It should be noted also, however, that Oriental juggling followed a somewhat different pattern than that which we have discussed. It consisted primarily of balancing feats. One particularly amazing trick which was quite common was the rolling on the body, in all sorts of ways, of a large trident. This trick, as was common with

most Oriental juggling, was usually coupled with amazing contortions and acrobatic skills. Another common feat was the manipulation and dexterous handling of large balls of twine or yarn. This was the basis for the fantastic use of rubber ball manipulation by the greatest juggler the world has ever known – Enrico Rastelli.

Enrico Rastelli

Once in every art's history, there emerges a figure whose talents and motivations are so unique that he will achieve heights in his profession which will never be surpassed and which still shine forth to dazzle any future aspirants. Such a person was Enrico Rastelli – undoubtedly the greatest juggler the world has yet produced. The feats of this fantastic performer are circus legend, and they seem even more phenomenal to those who understand their technical difficulty.

Enrico Rastelli was born into a circus family. His father was Alberto Rastelli, a juggler himself but primarily a circus aerialist or "flyer." Enrico was born in Siberia in 1896 when his family was touring Russia. Although he might have spent some of his early years in Italy, the greater portion of his youth was spent in Russia; and it was in Russia that he acquired his skill and his first great reputation.

His father wished for him to become an aerialist, and he did work in his father and mother's aerial act, but at a very early age juggling captured his being. To Rastelli, juggling was not a task to be laboriously performed; it was his first love. He literally practiced night and day throughout his short life. It was not uncommon for him to practice 12 hours a day, and he seldom practiced less than six. He would often converse with performers and even conduct his business affairs while practicing. He truly loved his art, and this love was clearly reflected in his miraculous feats. At one point in Germany, his act, which was a solo performance always, was so filled with variety that it lasted a full 40 minutes!

Rastelli's contributions to juggling were many, but the most important was his introduction of the manipulation of a large (six to 12 inches in diameter), air-filled rubber ball. At an early age, Rastelli saw the Japanese juggler Takashima, who used a cotton ball which he manipulated with a stick in his mouth. Rastelli saw the potentialities for exercising juggling skill with this and, by using a child's rubber ball instead of the cotton one, turned such manipulation into an unparalleled work of art. His feats were unbelievable in their exacting coordination as he threw and caught the ball with all parts of his body. It was Rastelli, too, who be-

gan the now commonly seen practice of throwing the ball into the audience, having them throw it back, and catching it on a stick held in his mouth. Rastelli was the father of what is usually called ball juggling – the physical manipulation in various ways of inflated rubber balls. Ball juggling includes such dexterous feats as spinning the ball on the fingers, bouncing the ball continuously on the head, and generally throwing and catching the ball with various parts of the body. The degree of control which Rastelli exhibited has never been entirely equaled. His manipulations even included the use of the oblong rugby football, a task still unmatched. In his last years Rastelli introduced the manipulation of the soccer ball into his act, and his extraordinary skill dazzled professional soccer players and fans alike. He could carry on a lengthy conversation while constantly and alternately, smoothly bouncing two balls on his forehead!

In addition to his mastery of ball juggling, Rastelli also was the master of what we shall term "pure" or straight juggling. Straight juggling consists of the ability to throw up a number of objects into the air and alternately catch them. This is the form which one usually associates with juggling. In our later discussion of the technical aspects of juggling, the reader will see that there are various "systems" of juggling which are quite independent from one another. The most common such technique or system for juggling is called "cascading" and this system is used only to juggle an odd number of objects. For some quite inexplicable reason, Rastelli never cascade juggled to any degree. Thus, he would juggle eight objects or six objects but not seven. It was possible that he could juggle seven objects, but he never did so in his act.

Rastelli limited himself to juggling three types of objects: small rubber balls, sticks and plates. Rastelli was the complete master of juggling eight balls. This is a phenomenal feat which is generally not appreciated by a non-professional viewer. The general public is full of misconceptions about juggling having seen circus posters showing drawings of performers manipulating a vast multitude of objects. When one considers that juggling eight balls means that seven balls must be separately hurled into the air with such speed and precision that the eighth ball can be hurled into the air smoothly before the first ball can be caught, one recognizes the great skill required. And throwing eight balls into the air and just catching them is difficult enough, but continuously keeping up such an orbiting rotation is infinitely more arduous. Rastelli did, in fact, throw up and catch 10 balls, but he did this for only one rotation. Apparently he only seriously concerned himself with attempting

10 balls when he heard that a member of the Amoros family had set a record juggling nine balls. Since Rastelli did not like to cascade juggle, he did not bother with nine balls and directly attempted 10. However, it must be noted that it was not just the quantity of objects which made Rastelli's juggling phenomenal; it was the facile and flawless manner in which he accomplished his astounding feats.

Rastelli never juggled the commonly seen Indian clubs which one sees jugglers using today; he juggled wooden sticks. Unlike a club, which is wider at one end, a stick is narrow and evenly balanced, although the stick does have one end (usually white) which is designed as its handle. Sticks and clubs are the most difficult

objects to juggle, for they must be given a specific number of turns in order that they might be properly caught on their handles. Rastelli juggled eight sticks, and he was the complete master of six sticks. Rastelli's juggling of six sticks has never been equaled. Not only did he juggle them at a fantastically quick pace, but he did so at a low height where others have not been able to juggle four. He juggled five sticks and one ball together – a most difficult feat due to the differences in weight and throwing technique. He also juggled six torches, and the things that he could do with three torches have never been equaled. His physical stamina was amazing in itself. He would juggle three torches passing them alternately under each leg while goose-stepping completely around a large stage three times!

Rastelli's juggling of plates was equally astounding. The nature of plate juggling, that is, their curious shape, makes



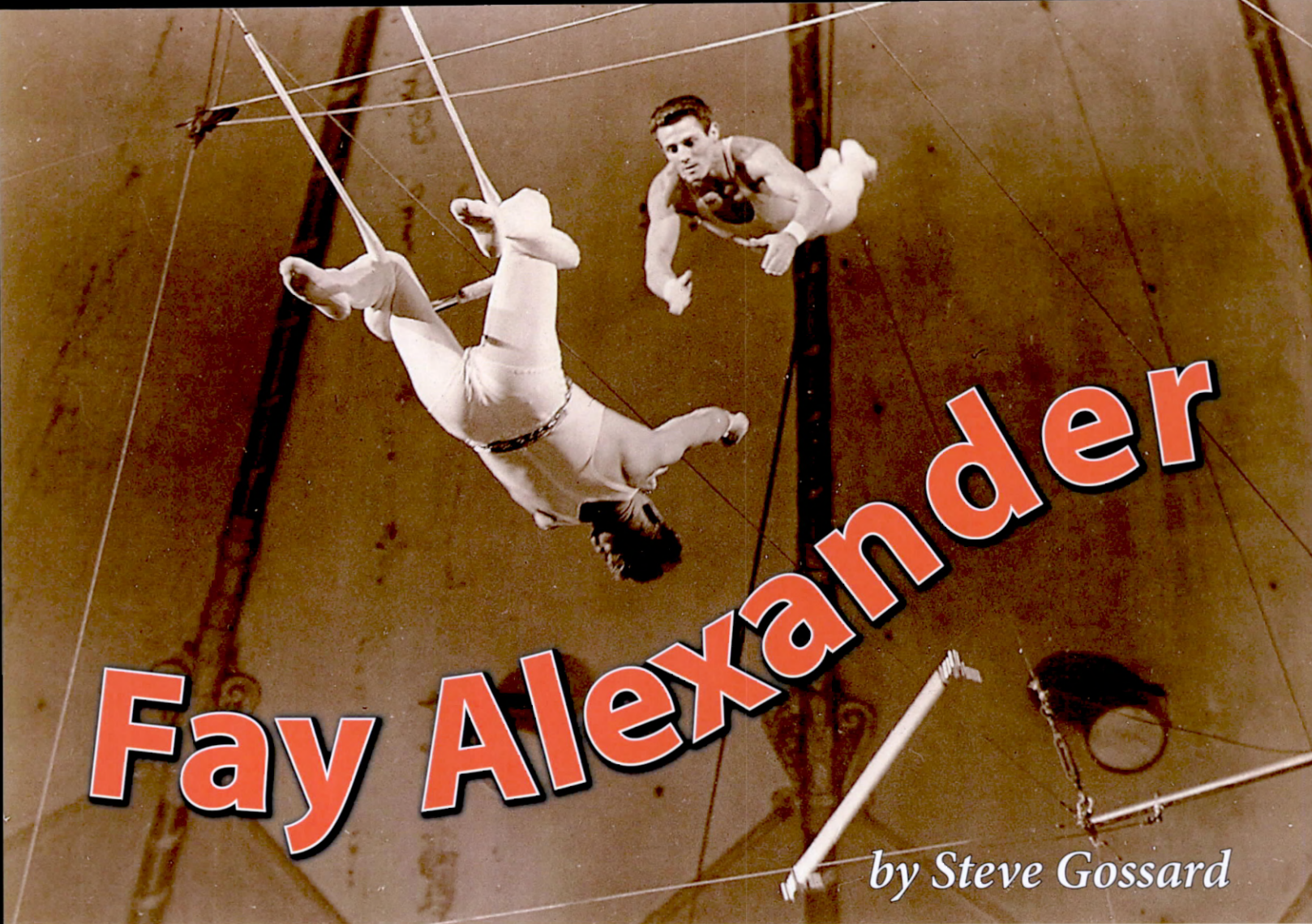
Enrico Rastelli during a performance in the Berlin Scala, March 2, 1928.

Sueddeutsche Zeitung photo/Alamy Stock Photo

it exceedingly difficult to initially throw up more than three from each hand. However, Rastelli overcame this difficulty by constructing an apparatus attached to his legs which could loosely hold two plates. He would then juggle six plates into the air, thereupon grabbing the additional two plates from his legs, and thus he got the full eight plates into a continuous orbit. And he would do this while simultaneously balancing a tall object upon his forehead! This feat has never been duplicated. He also was the first, and one of the very few jugglers, to juggle six plates while simultaneously bouncing a small rubber ball continuously upon his forehead.

Rastelli was not only a rare artist, but

also an intelligent and fine human being. He had the reputation of remarkably grand person and friend, and it was said that he had no enemies – a rare thing in such a competitive profession as show business. For example, when Rastelli fled Russia in 1919 due to the revolution there, he came to Italy virtually unknown. He initially went to work with the Circus Gatti and was an overnight sensation. But despite many great offers to appear in bigger and more spectacular shows, he remained with Gatti for a few years out of friendly loyalty. Finally he did leave Gatti, and in 1923 he visited the United States where he performed at the Hippodrome in New York. He returned to Europe and in Bergamo, Italy, in 1931, he cut his mouth very slightly with the mouthpiece that he used in his act. This cut became infected and he died. He was only 35 years old and in his prime. The world will never see his equal. **BW**



Fay Alexander

by Steve Gossard

Fay Alexander flying at the Cirque D'Hiver while filming for the motion picture Trapeze.

Author's collection

First published in Bandwagon September/October 2000.

Late in the evening on Sunday July 16, Rose Alexander sat at her husband's bedside. Husband Fay had been undergoing treatments for cancer for several months, but had recently taken a turn for the worse. No one could know how near the end might be.

"Do you want to come with me?" Fay asked Rose.

"I will be, soon," she said.

"I'll wait for you."

As Rose sat by, the weary vigil began to take its toll, and she began to nod off. "Go ahead and sleep," he said, "I'll be alright."

Try as she might, Rose could not stay awake. When she woke up Fay looked different. He was cold to the touch. He had gone to wait for her.

This was how the end came for Fay Alexander, the great performer, the skillful aerial artist, the sensitive barber. The world at large paid little attention to his passing, but the

news was a shock to that elite group of people who called themselves aerialists, because this was Fay Alexander. This was the soft-spoken, larger-than-life character who had inspired a generation of performers. This was the man, Fay Alexander, who was motivated always – always to give of his best.

He was born in Seattle in 1924. His father was trained as a barber. Fay was raised in the big city environment of Los Angeles during the depression. When Fay was recovering from an illness which resembled tuberculosis, his parents enrolled him in dancing lessons as a form of physical therapy. This training must have commenced at a very early age, because Billy Barton tells us in *Circus Reports* of March 22, 1976 that Alexander was already performing as a "singer of 'snappy songs' and as an 'acrobatic tap dancer'" at the age of three. Few young dance students have ever had the aptitude that Fay had. Few have ever internalized the disciplined attention to detail as he did. Few could ever hope to achieve his exquisite sense of timing and his orga-

nized understanding of his physical presence of space. Alexander developed as an artist before becoming an athlete.

Fay worked for a time with his sister, Dorothy, in an act which they called "The Alexander Twins." He learned how to shoulder responsibility very early. Their act supported the family in those years. When their father was able to open a barber shop of his own, the "kid act" split up and Fay was sent to school. In his teens he met Ted DeWayne, who had a Risley and teeterboard act which toured the West Coast. Imprinted on a life of show business from his earliest recollection, Fay grew restless. He quit school and joined the DeWayne troupe. The DeWayne act consisted of Ted, Fay, and Bill Snyder. They performed for eight years before the three men joined the Coast Guard. Initially the DeWayne act was able to live at home and tour the camp shows. They performed with Stars and Spars along with Victor Mature, with Sid Caesar, and with the Rudy Vallee show. When the show closed Fay shipped out to sea on a converted ocean liner with a crew of 950 men. He served in the Pacific for eight months and attained the rank of Master of Arms. When the war ended Fay was discharged.

For a time after the war the DeWaynes performed their Risley act with the Cid Groman show. At this time DeWayne acquired a flying return act rigging, and Fay, Ted, and Bill began practicing trapeze. Even without training exceptional talent will win out. With Snyder catching and DeWayne calling the timing from the ground, Fay was soon able to catch a double cutaway and a one-and-a-half somersault.

Jerry Wilson had a flying act called the Flying Behrs working fair dates in Texas in 1947. Jerry was the catcher for the act, and he was looking for a new principal flyer. At that time Fay was working as a prop hand. Wilson had



The "Alexander Twins," Fay and sister Dorothy, circa 1935.

Author's collection

heard that Fay was a flyer, and he approached him with a proposition which Fay could not refuse. If Alexander would come to Central America and work with his flying act on Gran Circo Americano, Jerry promised, he would pay all travel expenses plus a hundred dollars a week. In retrospect, Fay recalled to Billy Barton in 1976, "We did a *full* comedy flying act in grease-paint makeup. Then we stripped out of the comedy clothes and with full makeup still on, did a *full* straight flying act! ... I almost crawled from the tent, my tongue hanging out ... my hands were like hamburger." To add insult to injury, the contract was written in Spanish, and it was not in accord with their verbal agreement. Forced to pay his own transportation costs and expenses, Fay could barely make ends meet. He was exhausted and nearly broke. Wilson was persuaded to release him from his contract. He wired his parents for money to come home. As bad as this experience was, it did give him valuable experience with a professional flying act.

In 1948 Fay again joined the DeWayne troupe to work their acrobatic act with the Clyde Beatty Circus whose flying act left in mid-season. Clyde Beatty contracted Ted to provide the flying act with the show for the remainder of the tour. The act consisted of Ted DeWayne, Fay, Donny Johnson, Hank and Christine Monzello, and Bill Snyder working as the catcher.

Fay met a young trick rider named Rose Lamont who was working with Billy Hammond's Wild West Show, an after show feature of the Clyde Beatty Circus that year. Always a man who knew what he wanted, Fay asked Rose to marry him within a month. They were married in Vallejo, California in late May. In time Fay would train Rose to work with the flying act.

When the Beatty show closed in 1949, Fay wrote to Art Concello, General Manager with the Ringling Bros. and



Alexander (at back left) with the DeWayne Troupe on the Clyde Beatty Circus in 1948.

Author's collection

Barnum & Bailey Circus, to apply for a job with a flying return act. Concello knew him to be a competent flyer, and he hired him. Fay and Rose packed up everything they owned and moved to Sarasota. In his first experience working with the Big Show, Fay worked in one of the side rings with Jeanie Sleeter, Ski Otaris, and Dick Anderson catching. Willie and Annie Edelston and Carl and Dorothy Durbin worked the opposite ring, and Antoinette Concello's troupe worked the center ring position. The following year Anderson left during the shooting of *The Greatest Show on Earth*, and Fay requested Bill Snyder to come on as their catcher.

At this time Fay was performing a two-and-a-half somersault with the act. When the great film director Cecil B. DeMille asked for someone to double for Cornel Wilde in the movie, Concello recommended Alexander. This was Fay's first experience doubling before the cameras. It would prove to be a prestigious experience. *The Greatest Show on Earth* won 11 Academy Awards in 1952, including best picture.

Concello was opposed to trapeze performers practicing the triple somersault because he thought, for good reason,

that the trick was too dangerous and too hard on the flyer's shoulders. One trick was not worth risking a man's life or causing a physical disability. For a few weeks in 1950 while Art was away from the show, Fay was able to practice catching the fabled triple somersault. During a matinee performance that year, Fay caught his first triple somersault with Bill Snyder as his catcher. When Concello returned to the show, Fay was prohibited from practicing the triple again.

Fay tried it again in 1952 when Jimmy Crocker came into the act as his catcher, and once again Concello insisted that the triple would not be allowed on the show. Driven by his desire to achieve, Fay and Jimmy caught a perfect triple in performance on opening night at Madison Square Garden that year in

spite of Concello's objections. Billy Barton states that on that occasion Fay received a thunderous ovation for this achievement, and Art's wishes were overruled for once by popular demand.

Playing Springfield, Ohio in 1952, Fay took one of the worst falls which any flyer has ever survived. He completed a two-and-a-half somersault to a hand catch with his catcher, Jimmy Crocker, but as they swung back, they lost their wrist lock. Fay fell from the apex of his swing over the net apron into the 10th row seats, nearly 40 feet. As Rosie tells the story, a very large woman saw him falling, and just managed to sweep one of her children from the stands before Fay crashed into the seats. The fall would likely have been fatal if his head had not fallen into the lap of the woman's other son. Billy Barton described the scene for *Circus Reports* in 1976: "He lay there, huddled and small, among chairs and the screams of the audience, and the prop men running, and the band playing frantically."

A few days later Fay returned to work. He flew for 12 weeks in spite of the intense pain, climbing down the rope ladder at the end of each performance because he could

not stand to take the net falls. Concello sent Fay to a physician for X-rays where he was advised to give up flying for a year or more. He had broken two ribs, fractured a vertebrae in his neck, and severely damaged his shoulder. Concello had been one of the greatest flyers of all time before going into management, and he always took special care of his flyers. Art put Fay into a riding act and let him drop bars with the flying act for the remainder of the season to keep him on the payroll.

Feeling discouraged and apprehensive of his future as a flyer, Alexander again returned to Los Angeles with Rose where he enrolled in barber school. He became proficient at his trade, graduated and worked for a while in his father's shop. Though he did not dislike cutting hair, it could not compare with trapeze performance. He continued with physical therapy in the hope that he would fly again. By 1955 his shoulder was completely healed. He joined the Flying Hartzells as a replacement for Willie Edelston on the King Brothers show. Fay was with the Hartzells for only six weeks before he reached a turning point in his life.

Before becoming an actor, Burt Lancaster had worked in circus and vaudeville in a stationary bar act called Lang and Cravat. After achieving his peerless reputation in the field of motion pictures, Lancaster developed a system whereby he would alternately produce films with wide popular appeal, and films which were very high in artistic and intellectual quality. In 1955 Hecht-Lancaster Productions was casting a dramatic film in which the main characters, performers in a flying-return act, were aspiring to complete a triple somersault. The plot was based on a novel titled *The Killing Frost* by Max Catto, but the entire story was rewrit-



Eddie Ward, Fay Alexander, Gina Lollabrigida and Willie Kraus on the set.

Author's collection

ten for the screenplay. The main characters in the book had been dancers, but in the screenplay they were changed to aerialists. This added a dimension of danger and tension which went beyond the scope of the book. The homosexual conflict in the novel was replaced with a romantic triangle between the female flyer and the two men in the troupe. Gina Lollabrigida played the part of the woman flyer, Lola; Tony Curtis played the male flyer, Tino Orsini; and Lancaster played Mike Ribbel, the catcher. The conflict in the story pivoted on the quest for the completion of the elusive triple somersault, and the tension was focused on this supreme exercise in courage and physical excellence. The film was appropriately called *Trapeze*. It was the quintessential examination of courage and discipline,

and the art of trapeze would be the vehicle for this drama. Of course it was essential that the producers find someone who could complete the trick on film. A number of flyers had become legendary over the years for accomplishing the triple, notably Ernie Clarke, Ernie Lane, Alfredo Codona, Art and Antoinette Concello, Wayne Larey and Clayton Behee. But by 1955 all of these people had either retired from flying, had been injured while performing the triple, or had died trying. There were few flyers who were competent enough to even attempt this feat. Not only did Fay Alexander fit the physical description to perform the stunts for Tony Curtis, his form was exquisite.

Eddie Ward Jr. had been contracted to double for Lancaster as the catcher for the act. He showed up on the lot of the King Bros. Circus early in the season scouting for a flyer to double for Tony Curtis. Ward must have been aware that Fay had already done stunt work for *The Greatest Show on*



Fay Alexander cutting Burt Lancaster's hair as Tony Curtis watches on the set of *Trapeze*.

Author's collection

Earth. He offered the job to Fay and very soon the Alexanders were flying to Paris. Willie Kraus was also recruited to perform stunts, and Sally Marlowe was to do the stunt work for Gina Lollabrigida.

Alexander had not practiced the triple somersault for some time, and practice on the set at Cirque D'Hiver was intense. As the production evolved Fay took on more and more of the stunt work. The opening scene of the movie required a flyer to take a fall into the net and a bounce off of the ridge rope onto the floor. One of the top professional stunt men from Hollywood had refused to do it. Willie Kraus attempted the stunt twice, and was injured. Reluctantly, Lancaster agreed to let Alexander attempt the stunt, knowing that if Fay were injured their only hope of filming the triple would be lost. To everyone's relief, he completed the trick perfectly in one take.

Fay also doubled for Gina Lollabrigida in the web and single trapeze sequences because Sally Marlowe did not know enough about aerial work. He donned a wig and falsies to do the act. Gina was so offended to have a male stunt man doubling for her that she refused to appear on the set. Wire service releases from Paris reported that Gina refused to pose in still photos because Fay "made her look too much like Gary Cooper." Although there was no mistaking Fay's broad shoulders if one looked closely at the action in the film, the effect was remarkably convincing. Willie Kraus

played Gina's part in the flying act, dropping the bar when Fay returned to the pedestal board. Fay, Eddie and Willie practiced on the rigging in the evenings after the day's shooting had ended while Rosie and Jeannie Kraus watched. The Paris rats infested the building at night, however, and it wasn't long before the girls were driven from the grandstands.

When the cast learned that Alexander had been trained as a barber he was requested to do double duty and cut hair as well. He became the official barber on the set for Lancaster, Curtis and some of the production staff. In one scene from the movie the catcher, Mike, was trying to justify teaching Tino the dangerous triple somersault: "What do you want him to do, giant swings on a single bar? That's all right for music halls and street fairs," said Lancaster, and he followed with the ad-lib, "I'd rather see him cutting hair in a barber shop!"

Alexander and Lancaster developed a close personal friendship during the six months of filming. Burt had worked with the circus in his days as a bar artist with Nick Cravat, and had been married to June Ernest, one of the top professional women bar artists, for one year in 1935. As Dorothy Grotefent pointed out in her column for the *Long Boat Observer* of March 10, 1994 the Hollywood cast was a friendly group, but they did not share the same rare sense of "family" that the circus people did. In Paris the Lancasters and the Alexanders shared dinner every evening.

Fay was listed in the credits as "Technical Advisor, Flying Sequences," and he must have contributed much to the dialogue in the practice scenes throughout the movie. Having departed so drastically from the main plot of the novel, the screenplay had the freedom to rewrite the story. This made it possible, if not necessary, to improvise dialogue which was of a strictly technical nature. For example, as Mike instructed Tino in the art of flying: "Don't put your head down coming down the hill.... No, no, you're kipping too late," and "Now remember, don't fight that bar. Your natural break will give you all the height you need." At the conclusion of the movie, as Mike is leaving the act, he tells Tino's new catcher, "Keep him breaking full and strong. Make him drive that break. Now that he's got it, don't let him lose it." From the excitement of achievement to the sacrifice of friendship, these bits of technical instruction punctuated the emotional aspect of the story in subtle ways without descending to sentimentality. They helped to give

the dialogue an element of verisimilitude which set *Trapeze* far and away above any other circus film. Their inclusion in the story line reinforced the strong feeling of respect which Lancaster had for the profession in general, and the respect which he felt for Alexander in particular as a top professional in this unique field.

In the story, the circus manager has the net taken down while the act is in progress because he does not want Mike and Tino to complete the triple. John Ringling North is in the audience, and everyone feels certain that he will offer them a contract if he sees them perform the trick. Mike and Tino recklessly attempt the trick without the net. As described by Billy Barton, the actual completion of the triple on the film set was nearly as exciting as the scene in the movie. It was said that the studio was losing between \$25,000 and \$30,000 for each day's shooting, and the film was already several months behind schedule. The production was over budget by more than a million and a half. Cirque Bouglione was scheduled to move into the building. Barton described the scene on the set: "The morning of the shooting they moved the extras into the audience. The building was packed.

"That made it hotter,' says Fay. 'And it was warm outside which didn't help.'

"They began to film. Fay missed the first triple. They wiped him off, fixed his make-up.

"He went up again. He missed the second.

"Now the crew was getting nervous.

"I missed seven triples in a row,' Fay says.

"Shall we call it a day, Fay?' asked Burt, Sir Carol Reed (the director) behind him.

"No.... let me try one more.'

"Fay climbed the pedestal board.

"Action!' called Reed.

"Rosie crossed her fingers, sitting as part of the audience.

"Willie Kraus (as Gina) dropped the rise. Fay (as Tony) swung out and, on the eighth try, Eddie Ward (as Burt) caught the perfect triple somersault.

"Cut and print!' shouted Sir Carol Reed.

"And those Europeans, who hadn't seen a triple since the late Alfredo Codona, rose in their seats and gave me a standing ovation that lasted a *full fifteen minutes!*

"Fay, with tears streaming down his cheeks, stood helplessly on the pedestal board while the applause grew and grew until it sounded like hundreds of wild stallions running on the old roof of the Cirque D'Hiver.

"When Fay reached the ground Burt came up and shook his hand. 'I just want you to know,' he said, 'that whatever



Fay Alexander at the Cirque D'Hiver.

Author's collection

success comes of this picture, we owe it all to you.'"

In an article from Fay's collection titled "Great Trapeze Somersault" Ann Masters quoted Burt Lancaster as saying: "Fay had done the triple only six times in his life – and we had to take the chance that he could do it at least once more for us.

"Two months before the picture started shooting, he practiced every night.

"On the day that the big scene was scheduled to be shot, everyone in the company was keyed up to a high pitch of excitement. Again and again Alexander tried the triple. And again and again he failed....

"Finally we begged him to stop trying, but he kept saying, 'Let me try once more.'

"I'll never forget that last try. He did it – it was perfect – and everyone on the set let out a screaming cheer. They yelled and squealed and beat each other in a frenzy of joy



The Flying Alexanders with the Cavaretta Sisters (Paul McCausland, Kandy Cavaretta, Terry Cavaretta, Rose and Fay Alexander) in 1961.

Terry Cavaretta Archive

and excitement that lasted five minutes. Alexander, meanwhile, just stood up there on the platform, blushing crimson." Fay had come a long way from the self-taught flyer with the DeWayne troupe after the war.

Trapeze can now be considered a classic production. Its examination of the refinements of the art of flying was extraordinary. Its insights into the emotions of the flyers were a revelation. The ingenious way that it wove a faithful picture of these artists' lives into the plot places it in a special class of its own. What is more, this film inspired a generation of talented performers to dedicate their lives to the art of trapeze. Fay Alexander was an indispensable part of this film, and he certainly considered it one of the great accomplishments of his life. To the elite world of circus performers, Fay had become the personification of the word "trapeze."

When Fay completed work with the film he formed his own act, which he called the Flying Alexanders. When his catcher didn't show up for work with the flying act on the

Gil Gray show in 1956, he broke Bob Yerkes in as his catcher. Bob had worked with Fay in 1947 and 1948 in the DeWayne's teeterboard and Risley act. Yerkes worked with the Alexanders for the next six years, including two years on the Ringling Barnum show in 1957 and 1958. The Alexanders worked indoor dates with Polack Bros. from 1957 to 1961. In 1958 Fay doubled for Gilbert Roland, and Bob doubled for David Nelson in *The Big Circus*. Yerkes went on to train many more flyers. He taught nine performers to catch the triple somersault, and two to catch the three-and-a-half.

In 1961 Fay recruited a young lady named Kandy Cavaretta from the St. Petersburg, Florida Community Circus. The next year Kandy's family came to visit her with the show. When the family went home Kandy's younger sister, Terry, stayed with the Alexanders flying act. Fay trained the youngster, and at eight or nine years of age, Terry was one of the youngest flyers ever to work in a flying return act. In time she would prove herself to be the greatest woman flyer who ever lived, with an incredible career record of triple somersaults to her credit.

Over the years Alexander doubled for other movies. He doubled for Martha Ray and Doris Day in *Jumbo*. In *The Big Circus* he doubled for Gilbert Roland. He doubled for Henry Fonda in a made-for-television movie, *The Emmett Kelly Story*, a production which Rose states was never released.

Rose and Bob Yerkes' wife, Dorothy, also doubled for Bing Crosby's wife in *The Big Circus*. Rose was also doing stunt work for *The Emmett Kelly Story* when she was injured, and Donny Johnson came in and took her place.

As time went by the Flying Alexanders worked with a number of circuses. Besides major Shrine dates they worked off and on with the Gil Gray Circus, the Clyde Beatty show, the New York World's Fair in 1964, the Ringling-Barnum Circus for opening dates at Madison Square Garden, and with various parks and fairs. Fay taught aerial acts for the television production, *Circus of the Stars*, in the late 1980s. Fay received the George E. Cohan Award in Hollywood for two consecutive years in 1970 and 1971. This was an award for professional excellence in a specialized field.

Ed Sullivan presented him with the award in 1970, and Emmett Kelly made the presentation in 1971. Looking forward to the day when he would have to retire from flying, Fay bought Ernie Wiswell's "funny car" in 1967.

He renamed it "Al's Lemonzine" and from that time on

he booked the funny car along with his flying act for every performance. In 1974 Fay dislocated his shoulder while working with the flying act. The same year he tore the bicep muscle in his right arm. Although he still filled in occasionally when an act needed a flyer, or even a catcher, for all practical purposes Fay was retired from flying from that time on. He worked his funny car routine with Shrine dates for another 20 years.

I was lucky enough to know Fay Alexander for 10 years. My impression was that he was a very unassuming person, but justly proud of his accomplishments. His door was always open to his fans. He was always approachable. He had a meticulous attention for detail that came from years of working in one of the most dangerous professions. I had great respect for Fay as a person and as an artist, but what is more important are the opinions of his peers.

When he descended from the flybar, Fay was calm, deliberate, low keyed. More than one observer commented, "Rose does all the talking for both of them," which was a slight exaggeration. Truly, their personalities complemented one another. Rose states that Fay used to laugh at her because she would get so upset when he was driving that she had to put her face over the air-conditioning vent to cool off.

He had a great sense of humor. Terry Cavaretta recalls that when she and Kandy ate dinner with the Alexanders, Fay would sometimes watch her eating and point at something on her plate. "Are you going to eat that?" he would say. Tony Steele recalls Fay sitting at the dinner table pretending to pick his teeth with a piece of spring steel. He would flick babes at the people at the other tables, then look away nonchalantly picking his teeth when they looked up. For a number of years he continued to work his funny car routine for the sheer enjoyment of it. Once a few years ago Fay and Rose had passed through town to visit Dorothy Durbin in Bloomington, Illinois on their way to play a Shrine date in Iowa. I asked Dorothy where they were going next.

"To Iowa," she said.

"No, I mean after that."

"Then they go home."

"Home?" I asked, "Aren't they going on the road? Aren't they playing any more dates?"

"Nope," she said, "just the one."

"You mean they drive all the way up here just to play one date?"

"Yep," Dorothy said, "don't ask me why. That's just the way they do it."

Alexander was also sentimental. He once told me that he and Rose doted on the Cavaretta girls when they were



Fay Alexander in the summer of 1994.

Author's collection

with the act. "You know," he said, "Rose and I, we never had any kids, and they were so cute and all." In recent years he didn't feel that he could travel too far from home. He had to stay home and take care of his dogs. They depended on him.

Fay was admired and respected by everyone as the consummate artist who made a profound impression on the profession. A number of flyers have told me that watching the movie *Trapeze* was the greatest inspiration which shaped their professional lives. As Jim Cavaretta said, "To me he was the star. He was the greatest." In Tony Steele's words, "There is no sense talking about trapeze without talking about Fay Alexander. He was my personal inspiration when the movie, *Trapeze*, came out...He was everybody's idol. The most respected flyer in the world." What is more, Fay was a great and generous teacher. "He shared his knowledge and never held anything back." Tito Gaona states that when he was a young trampoline artist, *Trapeze* was an inspiration to him. He felt that fate was leading him into trapeze work because the main character's name was Tino, which was very close to his own name. Tito's sister, Chela, described Fay perfectly, "He was a great man, a great flyer and a great friend." **BW**

LOTUS



GRANDE DAME OF CIRCUS HIPPOS

by Richard Reynolds III

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Lotus, a female Common or Nile Hippo, was arguably the most famous of her species ever in America. She arrived here in 1903 for the Gollmar brothers, cousins of the Ringlings who, like their wealthier relatives, wintered their Gollmar Bros. Circus in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, 30 April 1903) told us that the hippo to become known as Lotus arrived in Baraboo on Sunday morning April 26, 1903, thus providing the exact date upon which she began her circus career.

Actually, if things had gone as planned, the Gollmars would not have purchased Lotus, for they had rented Ringling's male hippo Pete for the 1903 tour. That requires some explanation. In 1890 Pete had become the first hippo to troop with the Ringlings. This male had been in show business since 1881 when he was "imported from across the Atlantic" by the Janesville, Wisconsin showman Burr Robbins for the circus that carried his name. (Janesville's *Rock County Recorder*, March 18, 1881).

In addition to Pete the Ringlings also had the female Fatima. She was born at Central Park Zoo on September 4, 1890. They got her in 1897 because of plans for two circuses for 1898 and wanted a hippo for each one. They made arrangements with the Robinson family of Cincinnati to stage the John Robinson Circus that year (but only for that one year as it turned out). The Ringlings' decision to stage two shows was prompted by the fact that Barnum & Bai-

ley, the biggest name in the business, was widely known to be heading for Europe. Indeed, it embarked for London in November 1897 and would stay overseas for five years. That left a void in the eastern market that was dominated by the *Greatest Show on Earth*. The brothers did not want to miss that opportunity. So they sent their namesake show east in 1898, leaving the Robinson circus to work their traditional Midwestern territory. [See: Richard Conover's *Give 'Em a John Robinson* (1965)]. I have not been able to determine which hippo went with which circus.



Lotus pulling the high wheeled cart on the Al G. Barnes Circus in this undated image taken by circus photographer H. A. Atwell.

Circus World Museum

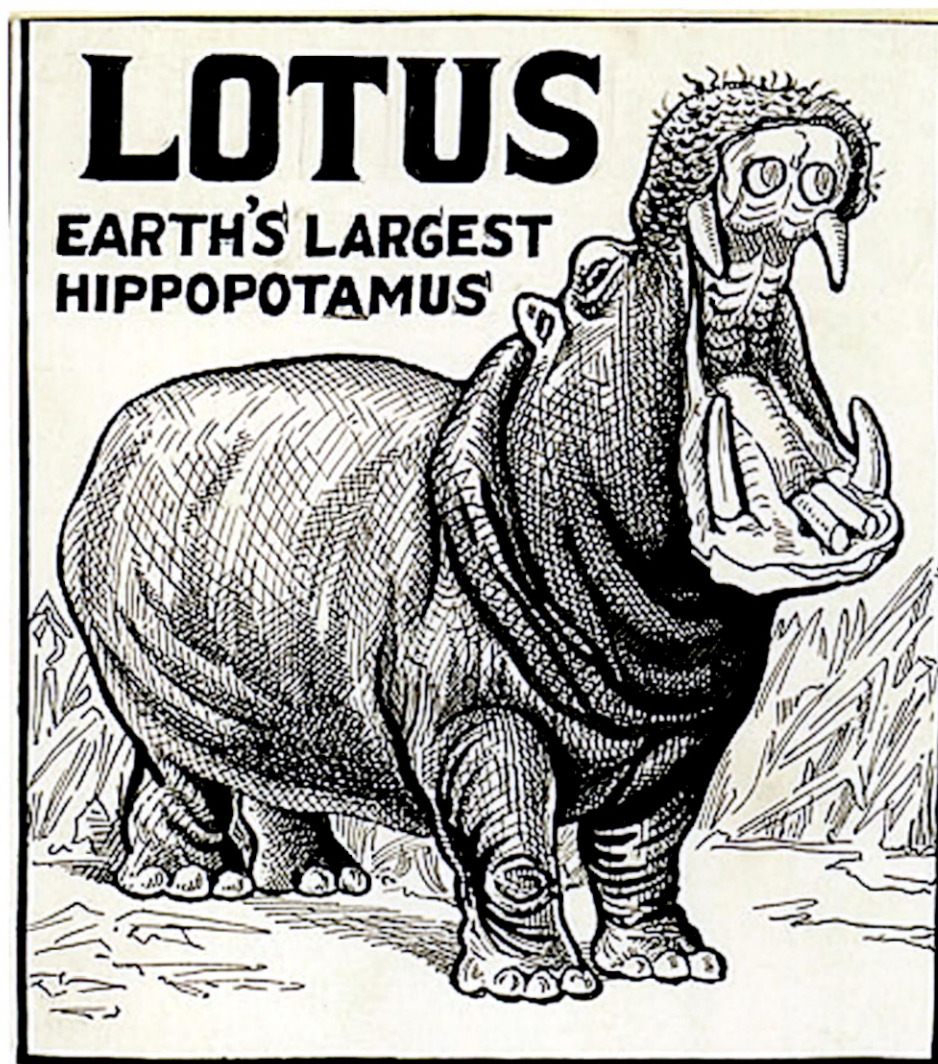
When the Ringlings went back to a single circus for 1899 et seq., they needed only one hippo. Though I cannot prove that they went exclusively with Fatima, there is rationale for that premise. For starters she was younger. Additionally, female hippos are usually of much sweeter disposition than males, which are often nasty, dangerous animals. Females are smaller and therefore easier

to accommodate in the usual hippo wagons. Moreover they do not have that "disgusting male habit," a reference to the boy hippo's spinning his tail like a propeller when he defecates, flinging feces in a wide arc. Though only natural as a territory marker, it can be offensive to the circus patron of refined sensibilities who, upon seeing the hippo standing up on the deck of his cage, gets too close when the hip lets it fly. No doubt partly for these reasons, the Ringlings considered Pete a surplus animal as the new century dawned.

For the 1902 season the Ringlings leased Pete to the Campbell Bros. Circus of Fairbury, Nebraska. The Campbells returned him at the end of that season. Pete was then rented to the Gollmar brothers for 1903. However, Pete up and died just two weeks before the season was to open.¹

The fore view of the great circus hippo Lotus, photographed by Bob Wallace in 1937.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection



This illustration was used in heralds and other advertisements for the Barnes show in the 1930s.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

That caught them in a bind with a lot of "Blood Sweating Behemoth" advertising paper on their hands. The hippo was to be the big feature. Newspaper ads had already been prepared proclaiming, in the finest tradition of circus bombast, as follows:

"Gollmar Bros.' \$20,000 Feature – The Only REAL LIVING HIPPOPOTAMUS – in captivity; a savage blood sweating terror of the River Nile; the weird man-slaying monster; the only one in the known world on exhibition; afternoon and evening in the Gollmar Bros.' millionaire menagerie." (*Sauk County Democrat*, Baraboo, 30 April 1903)

The late Judge Robert Gollmar of Baraboo, son of co-owner Fred Gollmar, told the story in his book, *My Father Owned a Circus* (1965). According to the Judge, when Pete

suddenly died his father made frantic calls and finally located a two and a half-year-old hippo in Hoboken, New Jersey. It turned out to be Lotus. Animal dealer Carl Hagenbeck of Hamburg Germany owned her. Gollmar bought the hippo sight unseen. In a seller's environment like that, the old German got a high price, \$4,000. Though five times less than claimed in the ads (see above), the price was nevertheless very high for a small circus. The Gollmar ledgers show that she was the most expensive animal they ever purchased. Judge Gollmar, born in 1903, the same year that Lotus arrived, told me that his father would jokingly say that Lotus cost him a lot more than his newborn son.

In late 1916 the Gollmars sold Lotus (plus the rest of their circus) to James Patterson who had her with his Patterson-Gollmar Circus in 1917. Patterson was mostly a carnival operator, did not tour a circus the next year, and, instead, had Lotus with his carnivals (Great Patterson Shows in 1918 and Patterson and Kline Shows in 1919). He sold her to Al G. Barnes in September 1919 when the Barnes circus was in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Barnes made a star out of Lotus. She was a staple of his shows. She was a very gentle animal, and at each performance she would either be led around the arena or would pull a high-wheeled cart around the track. Ringling gained control of the Al G. Barnes circus in 1929, but the new owner continued to feature Lotus in its performances. [For 1937 and 1938 the Sells Floto title was appended to that of Barnes. It was purely a name addition, for Sells Floto had been shuttered forever in Peru at the end of its 1932 tour.]

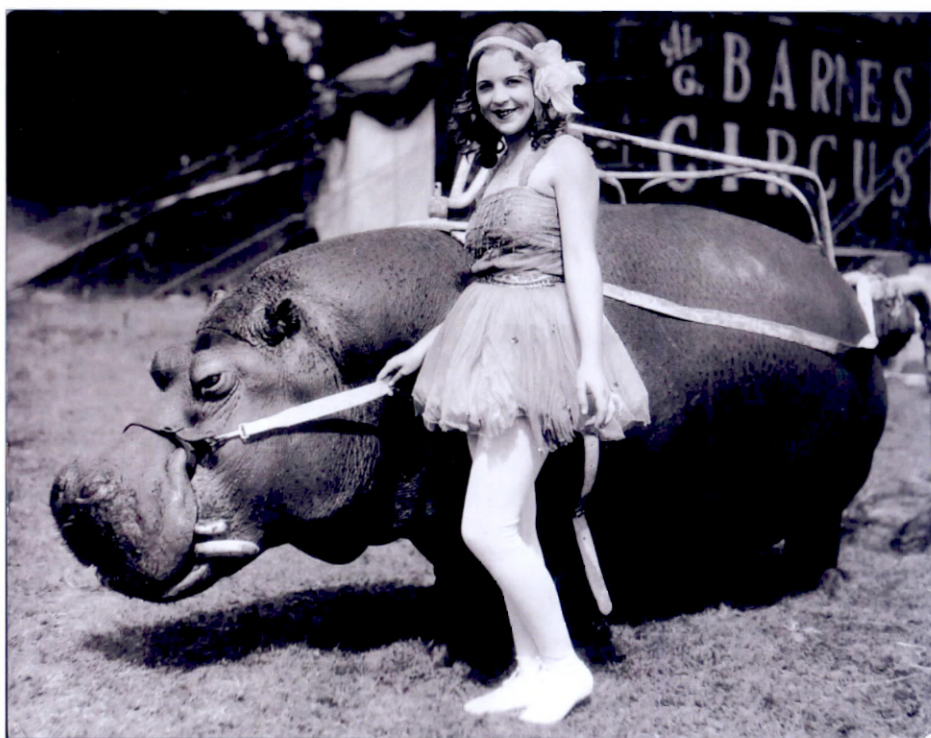
Lotus wound up being the most photographed hippo in circus history. With Barnes wintering in the Los Angeles area, she often posed for pictures with Hollywood celebrities. Our hippo appeared in two Johnny Weissmuller Tarzan movies produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1932) and *Tarzan and his Mate* (1934). For *Ape Man* she was joined by six other hippos shipped

to Los Angeles in October 1931. They came from the Peru, Indiana winter quarters of the Hagenbeck-Wallace and Sells Floto circuses. They were used to film a segment in which hippos attacked the rowboats of the great white hunters. It was shot in Lake Sherwood, California. The location is near Westlake Village and Thousand Oaks in Ventura County. A lot of jungle theme movies were made there.

Lotus became a real celebrity when photographer Bob Wallace took "fore and aft" photos of her that were printed, full size, on two pages of the February 8, 1937 issue of *Life* magazine. No other hippo ever got such "press." Sixteen years later the same pictures were published as a "Circus Classic" in Ringling-Barnum's 1953 route book (p.29). The "fore" view was also sold as a postcard by RB&BB.

This writer first saw Lotus in 1938 in Atlanta with the "Al G. Barnes-Sells Floto Combined Circus presenting Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey." That overlong title was the result of the addition of Ringling acts and equipment to Barnes-Sells Floto. A strike in Scranton, Pennsylvania had closed RB&BB in June of that year. So management sent a lot of RB&BB to its subsidiary show. The augmentation doubled the size of the Barnes circus. My first glimpse of the famous hippo came during the Sunday setup (November 6th) on Atlanta's old Highland Avenue showgrounds. Her cage wagon was spotted on the lot before being taken into the menagerie tent. We (my mother, father and I) joined a group of people gathered around it. A keeper removed one of the sideboards, and there was Lotus. The keeper had a hose and must have been replenishing her tank. I recall that he sprayed her with water (and probably put in some feed as well). Two days later, Tuesday November 8th, my father took me to the matinee. I remember that it was a cold and blustery day. Lotus did her famous walk around the hippodrome track. Right in front of us she stopped and opened her cavernous mouth for a treat of bran tossed in by her keeper. From that moment on she was my favorite circus animal.

At the end of that 1938 season, the Barnes circus was subsumed into Ringling-Barnum and Lotus then went into the menagerie of the *Greatest Show on Earth*. In addition



Lotus was photographed with one of the Barnes' showgirls in the late 1930s.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

to being a menagerie attraction in 1939, she also did her trademark walk around with the Big One that year, but that marked her last turn as part of the circus performance itself. However, she was to be seen in the RB&BB menagerie every season thereafter through 1942.

There was no common hippo on the Big One in 1943. Because of war-time restrictions imposed by the Office of Defense Transportation (ODT) the show was reduced in size that year and the menagerie exhibit was omitted. Instead they carried eight cage wagons and kept them in the backyard for use in the spec. It was a replica of a street parade. However, there was a hippo in that procession around the big top. It was a pigmy named Betty Lou, a familiar Ringling animal in her own right. Doubtlessly, she was selected over Lotus because she and her cage wagon were so much smaller and lighter than the massive den for Lotus and therefore easier to pull around the hippodrome track.

Lotus stayed back in Sarasota winter quarters in 1943 with a male named August who went back to 1910 as a circus hippo. Lotus returned to the road with RB&BB in 1944 when it once again carried its menagerie. To begin that tour, the show took out three hippos in three different cage wagons (a circus first). The hippos were the aforesaid pigmy Betty Lou plus two of the Nile species, Lotus and Chester. The last named was also a female. Her mannish

sounding moniker came from the fact that she was born in Chester, Pennsylvania on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1935. She had been a peripatetic animal, seeing earlier service on Hagenbeck-Wallace (1935); in the Detroit zoo (where she was loaned from 1936 into 1938); RB&BB in 1938-1939; and Cole Bros. in 1940-43 (also a loan – to replace Cole's pigmy hippo that died in the February 20, 1940 fire at Rochester, Indiana winter quarters). Chester returned for good to Ringling-Barnum in 1944.

Ringling's big top burned up in Hartford, Connecticut on July 6, 44 with a horrible loss of life (167 people killed). The show went back to winter quarters to regroup. It resumed the tour in August playing open-air engagements in stadiums. Lotus did not go back out and remained in winter quarters while Chester made the stadium tour. 1944 was Lotus' last year on the road. For its common hippo the show then toured with the much younger Chester. I saw the show in 1945 and in 1947-1950 and can attest that it was Chester, not Lotus in the menagerie. This was verified in 1966 interviews with Cecil R. Montgomery (1902-1977), former Ringling-Barnum menagerie superintendent. The 1952 and 1953 route books suggested that Lotus was in the menagerie, but Montgomery assured me that was wrong. It was Chester.

According to Montgomery, Lotus was bred by the male August at Sarasota and produced a calf that was born there. Unfortunately the calf drowned in the pool. Montgomery was uncertain of the date, but it must have been in the 1940s. She would have been at or over 40 years of age at the time.

Lotus' last moment of glory came in Cecil B. DeMille's Oscar winning 1952 movie *The Greatest Show on Earth*. Montgomery told me that he had taken her out of her enclosure to be walked alongside the circus train in front of the cameras in the loading scene at Sarasota winter quarters. That sequence was filmed on February 26, 1951.² She was thus the only hippo ever to have appeared in an Academy Award "Best Picture."

But her days were then numbered.

Your writer saw Lotus in her pool in Sarasota on March 15, 1953 and again, for the last time, on March 14, 1954. On that visit the keepers told me she was very feeble, hardly able to get out of the water. She died later that year, in mid to late October as best I can figure it. Dr. William Y. Higgins, one of the show's veterinarians, returned to Sarasota from the circus in early September 1954 to look after the animals in winter quarters. Louis Reed, noted elephant trainer, was also there breaking 20 new young Asian elephants sched-

uled to go out in 1955.³ Both were there when Lotus died. Higgins told me (1966 interview) that he and Reed had her removed from her pool and buried on the property. There was a huge empty section in the rear of the winter quarters that served as an animal graveyard. Before she was interred, the men popped out her tusks with a big wrench. Menagerie boss Montgomery got them, and he, in turn, gave them to me. They are the prizes of my collection.

Altogether, Lotus was a circus animal for 51 years and 6 months. Adding that to her estimated age of two and a half upon her arrival in 1903 would have made her at or about 54 when she died. That is one of the world's best longevity records for a common hippopotamus. When she died, the late Dr. William M. Mann, legendary director of Washington's National Zoo, felt as though he had lost a friend. He said that she was a most unusual hippo. She loved to travel but most remarkable of all, she obviously liked people. Instead of displaying a surly hippo resentment at the crowds of human beings that always surrounded her, she thoroughly enjoyed being a circus star. "Everybody is missing the fat girl," said Dr. Mann, "that's for sure."⁴

Lotus was indeed the Grande Dame of circus hippos. **Bw**

Endnotes

1. An old hippo died at Ringling quarters in Baraboo on February 22, 1910. *Billboard*, March 12, 1910, (p.19) erroneously identified him as Pete. Not so. The 1910 deceased was a male named Dick. He had joined Sells Bros. in 1880 and was sent to Baraboo when its later amalgam, Forepaugh-Sells, was shelved in November 1907. *The Baraboo News*, March 3, 1910, identified the dead hippo as the former Sells Bros. animal. Rest assured, Pete died in 1903 as described above.
2. For the date of the hippo filming see: Jerry Digney's "Cecil B. DeMille's Greatest Show on Earth – Film Epic 40 Years Ago," *Bandwagon*, November-December 1991.
3. A *Billboard* article (October 23, 1954, p. 60), by-lined in Sarasota on October 16th told of Higgins and Reed being at the winter quarters and said that the animals there included "one hippo." That would have to be Lotus, meaning that she was still alive on October 16th or at least was there when the information for that item was gathered. She must have died around that date.
4. Dr. Mann was quoted in Harman W. Nichols' "Favorite Circus Fat Lady," *Bandwagon*, 17 March 1955, p.8.

The rear view of Lotus as photographed by Bob Wallace in 1937.
The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection



